



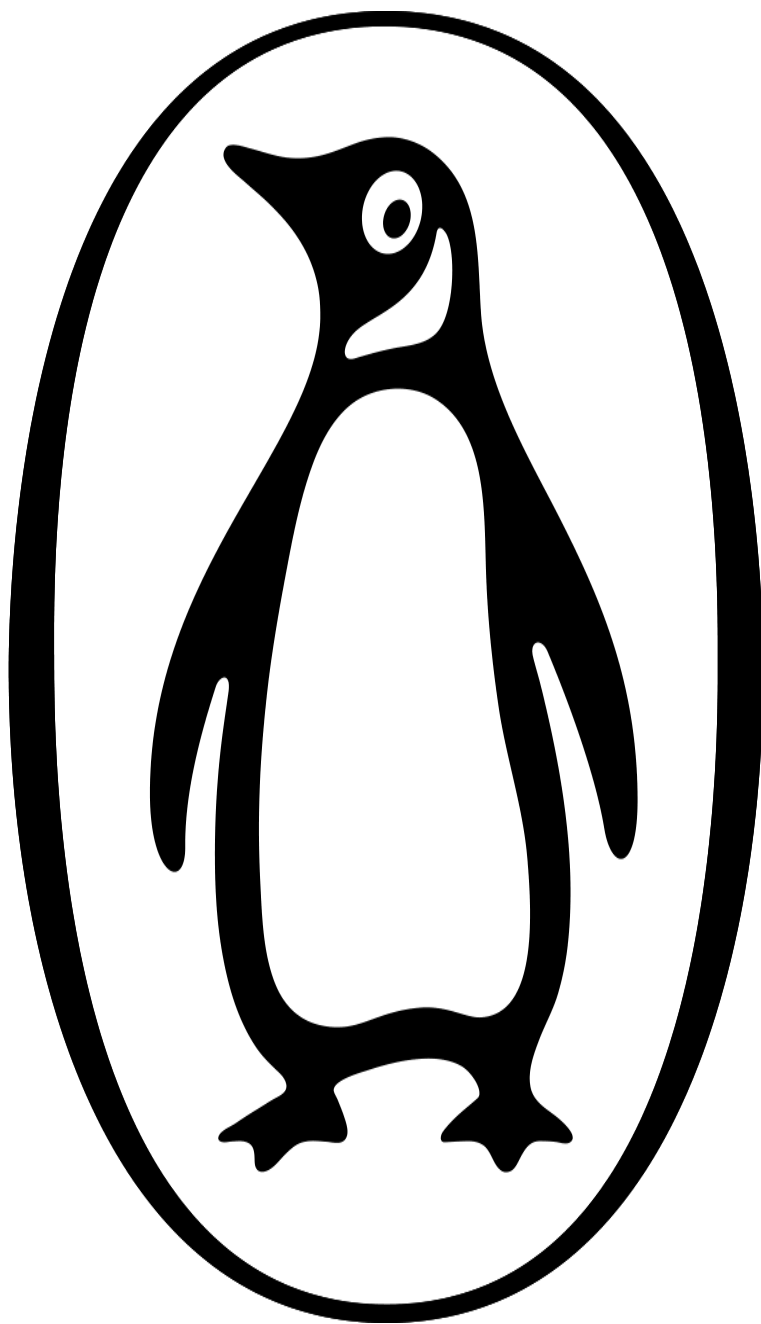
PENGUIN



CLASSICS

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

Poor Folk and Other Stories



POOR FOLK AND OTHER STORIES

FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOYEVSKY was born in Moscow in 1821, the second of a physician's seven children. His mother died in 1837 and his father was murdered a little over two years later. When he left his private boarding school in Moscow he studied from 1838 to 1843 at the Military Engineering College in St Petersburg, graduating with officer's rank. His first story to be published, 'Poor Folk' (1846), was a great success. In 1849 he was arrested and sentenced to death for participating in the 'Petrashovsky circle'; he was reprieved at the last moment but sentenced to penal servitude, and until 1854 he lived in a convict prison at Omsk, Siberia. In the decade following his return from exile he wrote *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (1859) and *The House of the Dead* (1860). Whereas the latter draws heavily on his experiences in prison, the former inhabits a completely different world, shot through with comedy and satire. In 1861 he began the review *Vremya (Time)* with his brother; in 1862 and 1863 he went abroad, where he strengthened his anti-European outlook, met Mlle Suslova, who was the model for many of his heroines, and gave way to his passion for gambling. In the following years he fell deeply in debt, but in 1867 he married Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina (his second wife), who helped to rescue him from his financial morass. They lived abroad for four years, then in 1873 he was invited to edit *Grazhdanin (The Citizen)*, to which he contributed his *Diary of a Writer*. From 1876 the latter was issued separately and had a large circulation. In 1880 he delivered his famous address at the unveiling of Pushkin's memorial in Moscow; he died six months later in 1881. Most of his important works were written after 1864: *Notes from Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1865-6), *The Gambler* (1866), *The idiot* (1869), *The Devils* (1871) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

DAVID MCDUFF was born in 1945 and was educated at the University of Edinburgh. His publications comprise a large number of translations of foreign verse and prose, including poems by Joseph Brodsky and Tomas Venclova, as well as contemporary Scandinavian work; *Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam*; *Complete*

Poems of Edith Södergran; and *No I'm Not Afraid*, the selected poems of Irina Ratushinskaya. His first book of verse, *Words in Nature*, appeared in 1972. He has translated a number of nineteenth-century Russian prose works for the Penguin Classics series. These include Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The House of the Dead*, *Poor Folk and Other Stories* and *Uncle's Dream and Other Stories*, Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories* and *The Sebastopol Sketches*, and Nikolai Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. He has also translated Babel's *Collected Stories* and Bely's *Petersburg* for Penguin.

POOR FOLK AND OTHER STORIES

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY



TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY
DAVID McDUFF

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INTRODUCTION



Dostoyevsky began his literary career as a translator of French fiction and the author of some plays inspired by his reading of Schiller. As an army sublieutenant in his early twenties attempting to finance a somewhat extravagant lifestyle on a budget consisting of his army salary and the not inconsiderable allowance he received from Karepin, the trustee of his father's estate, of 5,000 paper rubles per annum (a paper ruble was roughly equivalent in value to one third of a silver ruble), he turned increasingly to literary activity in the hope of combining his recently acquired idealistic philosophical convictions with his desire for fame and fortune. Of the plays, we know only that he wrote a pair of dramas, begun around 1841, entitled *Maria Stuart* and *Boris Godunov*, and a 'Shakespearean' play modelled on *The Merchant of Venice* called *The Jew Yankel* – the titles are all that has survived of them. We have rather more information about his activity as a translator. Like the theatre, French novels were extremely popular in the St Petersburg of the 1830s and 40s. The writings of Balzac, Sue and Hugo exercised a huge fascination on the Russian educated reading public. When Balzac visited St Petersburg for three months in 1843 he was greeted with universal acclaim as a literary hero. One of Dostoyevsky's early major translation projects was a complete Russian version of Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet*. Dostoyevsky's biographer Konstantin Mochulsky writes of this:

the translator intensified the emotional tone of the novel and did not hesitate to employ effective similes and picturesque epithets. Under his pen the story of Eugénie's sufferings is transformed into a tale of 'the unfathomable and horrifying tortures' of a poor young girl whose image for some reason or other he compares with an ancient Greek statue. This first literary attempt, after the editors had abridged it by a third, appeared in *Repertoire and Pantheon*.*

Balzac's influence on Dostoyevsky was profound and far-reaching. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that, without it, he might never have

developed his creative talent in the direction he ultimately chose. In the character of Péré Goriot, for example, Dostoyevsky found the antecedent for a whole range of his own 'insulted and injured' civil servants, while Rastignac is in many senses a forerunner of Raskolnikov. It was while he was working on his translation of *Eugénie Grandet* that Dostoyevsky conceived the idea for a novel of his own, of roughly the same length. In reply to his brother Mikhail, who was urging him to consider a career in the theatre as a playwright, and with whom he was planning a translation of Schiller's plays, he objected that he needed money right away, and the rehearsal and performance of plays took time. 'I have a hope,' he wrote to Mikhail on 30 September 1844.

I am finishing a *novel* of the same dimensions as *Eugénie Grandet*. It's rather an original piece of work. I'm at present copying it out, and I shall probably have had a reply concerning it by the 14th. I'm going to send it to *Notes of the Fatherland*. (I'm satisfied with my work.) I may get 400 rubles for it, and therein lie all my hopes.

The first draft of the novel, *Poor Folk*, was completed in November 1844. Three major revisions followed – one in December of that year, and two more in February and April 1845. This work of polishing, revising and rewriting seems to have possessed an almost religious significance and urgency for the writer. 'And now, on the subject of bread and butter!' he wrote to Mikhail on 24 March.

You know, brother, that as far as that is concerned I depend upon my own strength. But whatever may happen, I have vowed to myself that even though doing so may kill me, I will remain firm and refuse to write to order. Writing to order crushes and ruins everything. I want each of my works to be distinctly good. Look at Pushkin, at Gogol. Neither of them wrote a great deal, yet they are both awaiting monuments. And now Gogol commands 1,000 silver rubles per printed sheet, while Pushkin, as you know, was able to sell one of his poems for a gold sovereign. But their fame, particularly that of Gogol, was bought with years of poverty and hunger... Raphael painted for years, polishing his work and licking it into shape, and the result was a miracle: gods were created by his hand. Vernet takes a month to complete a picture...

This invocation of great names is significant: in his dissatisfaction with the form of his novel Dostoyevsky is expressing what he consciously perceives to be the discontent of a truly great artist, one who will rise above the crowd of common 'feuilletonists' and survive into posterity. Here, too, we can detect the vanity and incipient megalomania which was to cause him such trouble later on. The 'hopes' of which he wrote to Mikhail were powerful ones indeed, compounded of immense personal ambition and a struggle

against a poverty that was, to some extent at least, self-imposed, and came to assume a life-or-death quality. Later in the same letter we read:

I am seriously pleased with my novel. It is a strict and shapely work. There are, however, terrible defects... The time is near when I have promised to be with you, dear friends. But I shall not have the means to do that – the money, in other words... I hope to save the whole situation by my novel. If my project does not succeed, I may hang myself.

And further on:

In a feuilleton published in *The Invalid* I have just finished reading about the German poets who have died of hunger and cold, and in madhouses. There have been twenty of them so far, and what names! It all still fills me with terror...

Dostoyevsky's friend and room-mate, D. V. Grigorovich, urged the writer to submit the manuscript of *Poor Folk* to the poet N. A. Nekrasov for evaluation, in the hope that Nekrasov would in turn show the work to the celebrated, highly influential and much feared literary critic Vissarion Belinsky. The story of how this came about and of what followed is contained in Dostoyevsky's *Diary of a Writer* for 1877 – more than thirty years after the event:

I was living in St Petersburg, having relinquished my post at the Palace of Engineers a year earlier without really knowing why, with the vaguest and most imprecise ends in view. It was May 1845. At the onset of winter I had suddenly begun *Poor Folk*, my first tale, having written nothing before that time. Having finished the work, I did not know what to do with it or to whom I should give it. I had absolutely no literary acquaintances whatsoever, except possibly for D. V. Grigorovich, though he too had written nothing before that time apart from a single short article entitled 'The Organ-Grinders of St Petersburg' in a certain symposium. I believe he was at the time preparing to leave for his country estate for the summer, and was staying temporarily in St Petersburg with Nekrasov. Dropping in to see me one day, he said: 'Bring your manuscript' (at that time he had not yet read it); 'Nekrasov is intending to publish a symposium next year, I'll show it to him.' I brought the manuscript along, saw Nekrasov for a minute or two, and we shook hands with each other. The thought that I had brought my work to him made me feel embarrassed, and I soon left, hardly having exchanged a word with the poet. I had little thought of success, and this 'party of *Notes of the Fatherland*', as it was usually described at the time, inspired me with fear. For several years I had been reading Belinsky with enthusiasm, but I found him stern and intimidating, and – 'he'll make a laughing-stock of my *Poor Folk*,' I sometimes used to think. But only sometimes: I had written the work with passion, with

tears, almost – ‘can it really be that all those moments which I have experienced with my pen in my hand as I wrote that tale – can it really be that all that is a falsehood, a mirage, an infatuation?’ This thought came to me only occasionally, of course, and it would be immediately supplanted by my customary anxiety. On the evening of the day I delivered my manuscript, I made a rather long journey on foot to see one of my old companions; we spent the entire night talking about *Dead Souls* and reading it together for the umpteenth time. Such meetings were quite common among young men at that time; two or three would gather together, and one of them would say: ‘Let’s read some Gogol together, gentlemen!’ Then they would sit down and read, all night, most likely. In those days a great many young men were instilled with a certain kind of feeling, and seemed to be waiting for something. I did not arrive home until four o’clock in the morning; it was a St Petersburg white night, as bright as day. The weather was fair and warm, and upon returning to my lodgings I did not go to bed, but opened the window and sat near it. Suddenly the doorbell rang, quite unexpectedly, and there were Grigorovich and Nekrasov, rushing to embrace me in complete ecstasy, both of them practically in tears. The evening before they had gone home early, taken my manuscript and begun to read it to see what it was like: ‘We’ll know after ten pages,’ they had said. But, having read ten pages, they decided to read another ten, and then they sat up all night until morning reading aloud, one taking over from the other when either was tired. ‘Nekrasov was reading aloud the part about the death of the student,’ Grigorovich told me later when we were alone, ‘and suddenly I saw him reach the passage where the father runs along behind his son’s coffin; his voice broke several times, and suddenly he could restrain himself no longer, slapped his hand down on the manuscript, and said: “Oh, if only I were he!” This about you, and so it went on all night.’ When they had finished (seven printers’ sheets!) they decided as one man to go to see me immediately: ‘It doesn’t matter if he’s asleep, we’ll wake him up – *this* is more important than sleep!’ Later, when I had grown accustomed to Nekrasov’s character, I frequently experienced surprise at the memory of that moment: his temperament was so closed – anxious, almost, so cautious and uncommunicative. Thus, at least, he always seemed to me, so that the moment of our first meeting was truly a manifestation of the very deepest emotion. On that occasion they stayed with me for half an hour, and for half an hour we discussed God only knows how many things, understanding each other in half-words, with exclamations, hurrying; we talked about poetry, and about Gogol – with quotations from *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls* — but mostly we discussed Belinsky. ‘I shall take your tale to him today, and you will see – I mean, what a man he is, what a man! You will make his acquaintance, and you will see what a soul he has!’ Nekrasov said enthusiastically, shaking me by the shoulders with both arms. ‘Well, now you can sleep – go on, sleep, we’ll leave now, and tomorrow you will come and see us!’ As though I could have slept after their visit! What ecstasy, what success, and, most important of all, the feeling was dear to me, I remember it clearly: ‘Some people have success, they are praised, greeted, congratulated, yet these men came running in tears, at four o’clock in the morning to wake me up because this was more important than sleep... How wonderful!’ That was what I was thinking; how could I have slept?

Nekrasov took the manuscript to Belinsky that very same day.

He held Belinsky in veneration and, I believe, loved him all his life more than anyone else. In those days Nekrasov had not yet written anything on the scale he was soon to achieve, a year later. Nekrasov turned up in St Petersburg at the age of about sixteen, completely alone.

His writing career began from practically the same age. Of his friendship with Belinsky I know little, except that Belinsky divined his talent from the very beginning and may have exercised a powerful influence on the tenor of his poetry. In spite of all Nekrasov's youthfulness and the difference in their ages, even at that time there probably passed between them moments and words of the kind that leave their mark for ever and bind two people irrevocably to each other. 'A new Gogol has appeared!' Nekrasov shouted, as he entered Belinsky's study holding the manuscript of *Poor Folk*. 'With you, Gogols grow like mushrooms,' Belinsky observed severely, but accepted the manuscript all the same. When Nekrasov called back to see him in the evening, Belinsky greeted him 'in a state of downright excitement': 'Bring him here, bring him here at once!'

And lo and behold (this must have been on the following day), I was taken to see him. I remember that I was most struck by his external appearance, by his nose, his forehead; for some reason I had imagined him to be quite different – 'that terrible, that fearsome critic'. He greeted me in a manner that was thoroughly solemn and reserved. 'Oh well, I suppose that's the way it has to be,' I thought; but it seemed that a minute had not passed, before everything was transformed: his solemnity was not that of an important personage, a great critic greeting a 22-year-old beginning writer, but was instead prompted, as it were, by the feelings he wanted to pour out to me as soon as possible, and by the solemn words he was in extreme haste to address to me. He began to speak ardently, with burning eyes: 'Do you understand?' he asked me in his customary falsetto. 'Do you understand what you have written?' He always shouted in a falsetto when he was in the grip of powerful emotions. 'You have merely described it indirectly, with your artist's intuition; but have you pondered on the meaning of this terrible truth to which you have directed us? It cannot be that with your twenty years you can have understood this. Why, this unfortunate clerk of yours – why, he has worked so hard in the service and brought

himself to such a point that he does not even dare to consider himself unhappy, out of humility, and views the slightest complaint as practically tantamount to free-thinking, does not even dare to acknowledge his right to unhappiness, and, when a kind man, his general, gives him a hundred rubles, he is completely shattered, annihilated with amazement that “Their Excellency” could have taken pity on one such as himself – not “His Excellency”, but “Their Excellency” as it is expressed in your tale.* And that torn-off button, that moment when he kisses the general’s hand – why here is no longer compassion for this unfortunate man, but horror, horror! In this very gratitude of his there is horror! It is a tragedy! You have touched the very heart of the matter, you have pointed to the essential in one single flash. We publicists and critics merely reason, we attempt to elucidate all this in words, while you, an artist, represent the very essence in a single line, a single instantaneous image, so vivid that one feels one could touch it with one’s hand, that the most unreflecting reader could instantly understand everything! There is the secret of creativity, there is the truth of art! There is devotion to the artist’s truth! Truth has been revealed and proclaimed to you as an artist, you have inherited it as a gift; so value your gift and remain loyal to it and you will be a great writer!...’

All this he said to me on that occasion. All this he later said to many other people besides, people who are still alive now and are able to bear testimony that it was so. I left his house in a state of intoxication. I stopped at the corner, looked up at the sky, at the bright day, at the people going past, and felt with my entire being that a solemn moment had occurred in my life, that my life had been subjected to a change of fortune that would affect it for ever, that something entirely new had begun, but such a thing as I had not envisioned even in my wildest dreams. (I was a terrible dreamer in those days.) ‘Am I really so great?’ I wondered in embarrassment and a kind of timid ecstasy. Oh, don’t laugh, never again did I think I was great, but then – how could I endure what I had been told? ‘Oh, I will be worthy of these praises, and what men, what men!’ I thought. ‘There are men for you! I shall endeavour to earn their praise, I shall make every effort to become as noble as they are, I will be “loyal”! Oh, how frivolous I am! If Belinsky only knew what worthless, shameful things there are in me! Yet people still say that these *littérateurs* are proud and vainglorious. While the fact is that

these men are to be found only in Russia, they are alone, but they, they alone possess the truth, and truth and goodness will always be victorious and triumphant over sin and evil, we shall prevail; Oh, let us go to them, with them!’

All these things passed through my mind; I remember that moment with the fullest clarity. And never subsequently have I been able to forget it. It was the most heavenly moment in my whole life. When I was serving my term of penal servitude, the mere recollection of it was enough to keep my spirits up. Even now I remember it each time with ecstasy.

The rest of the story surrounding *Poor Folk* and the beginning of Dostoyevsky’s career as a professional writer has been told by his biographers, and is too well-known to need recounting. Suffice it to say that Belinsky was mistaken in supposing the young writer to be an artistic mouthpiece for his own social and political views. For a time, while he enjoyed Belinsky’s support, Dostoyevsky indulged in a bout of euphoric joy at his own success. This euphoria, which at times bordered on the manic, gave rise to some rather odd letters written to Mikhail. One, dated 16 November 1845, contains the following passage:

Really, brother, I do not think my fame will ever again reach such an apogee as it has now attained. On all sides I am accorded incredible respect, there is a fearful amount of curiosity about me. I have made the acquaintance of a vast number of the most honoured members of the establishment. Prince Odoyevsky has asked me to favour him with a visit, while Count Sollogub is tearing his hair out in despair. Panayev told him that a talent had appeared which would trample them all into the mire. Sollogub went running to visit everyone and, dropping in on Krayevsky, suddenly asked him: ‘Who is this Dostoyevsky? Where can I *get hold of Dostoyevsky?*’ Krayevsky, who never minces his words or spares anyone’s feelings, told him in reply that ‘Dostoyevsky does not wish to do you the honour of favouring you with a visit.’ It really is so: the miserable little aristocrat has now mounted his high horse and thinks he can crush me with the lavishness of his flattery. Everyone receives me as though I were a living wonder. I cannot even open my mouth without it being repeated in every corner that Dostoyevsky said this, Dostoyevsky is going to do that. Belinsky loves me as his very own son...

When *Poor Folk* was finally published in the *St Petersburg Almanac* for January 1846, its reception by the critics was far less positive than might have been expected after the furore of interest and publicity that had been whipped up by Belinsky’s sudden enthusiasm. To make matters worse, *The Double*, the ‘St Petersburg

Poem' that constituted Dostoyevsky's second major prose work, also received adverse reviews – though Belinsky praised both works in his *Notes of the Fatherland* article. The contrast between the initial sense of triumph and the bitter disillusionment that followed set the key for the whole of the writer's torn and conflict-ridden biography. Likewise, *Poor Folk* itself, far from being the impassioned outpouring on the theme of social evils which many contemporary critics believed it to represent, was the cornerstone of Dostoyevsky's fictional art, a carefully wrought narrative work which both displays its roots in European fiction (the epistolary novel of Smollett, Rousseau and Goethe, the *drame dialogué* of Walter Scott, the moral-social universe of Balzac) and points forward to the peculiarly Russian works of the author's maturity.

Of the other prose pieces included in the present volume, *The Landlady* (1847) reflects Dostoyevsky's lifelong love of the novellas of the German romantic writer E. T. A. Hoffmann, and also anticipates Annensky, Blok and the 'Silver Age' of Russian poetry (many Symbolist poets were influenced by the tale), while *Mr Prokharchin* (1846) and *Polzunkov* (1847) show the author striving for a narrative compression to equal that of the short stories of Pushkin – though with vastly different artistic means. In these extraordinary and terrifying character sketches, where the very texture of existence itself is called into question, we look forward not only to the monologues of Marmeladov and Svidrigailov, but also to the short stories of Kafka. Dostoyevsky was seldom as 'modern' as he is here.

NOTE ON THE TEXT



The text used for the present translation is identical with that contained in *F. M. Dostoyevsky, Polnoye sobranie sochineniy v tridsati tomakh* (*Editions, Journalistic Writings, Letters and Notebooks*), 30 vols, Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", Leningrad, the first four volumes of which were published in 1972.

POOR FOLK



A NOVEL

Oh, those storytellers! They can't rest content with writing something useful, agreeable, palatable – they have to dig up all the earth's most cherished secrets!... I'd forbid them to write, that's what I'd do! I mean, have you ever known the like? A man reads... and finds himself reflecting – and before he knows where he is, all kinds of rubbish come into his head. I'd forbid them to write, truly I would; forbid them to write altogether!*

Prince V. F. Odojevsky

April 8

My precious Varvara Alekseyevna.

Yesterday I was happy – inordinately, impossibly happy! For once in your life, you stubborn girl, you have done as I asked. In the evening, at about eight, I woke up (you know, little mother, how I like to sleep for an hour or two after the completion of my duties). I had found a candle and some paper, and was sharpening my pen, when suddenly I happened to raise my eyes – and I will tell you that my heart fairly gave a leap! So you had guessed, after all, what it was my poor heart desired! I saw that one tiny corner of the curtain at your window had been pulled up and hitched onto the pot of balsams, precisely, oh, precisely in the way I had hinted you might do it when we met that time; I at once fancied that I saw your little face at the window for a moment, that you were looking down at me from your little room, that you were thinking about me. And oh, my little dove, how disappointed I was when I simply could not discern your charming little face properly! There was a time, little mother, when I, too, had good eyesight. Age is no joke,

my darling! Even now my eyes seem to swim all the time; you do a bit of work of an evening, write a bit, and the next morning your eyes are all red, with the tears streaming down your face so you're ashamed to be seen by strangers. But anyway, in my imagination your smile fairly shone, my little angel – your kind, affectionate little smile and in my heart I had exactly the same sensation as that time I kissed you, Varenka, do you remember, my little angel? Do you know, my little dove, I even fancied that I saw you wag your finger at me up there! Did you, you mischievous girl? Please give me a detailed account of all this in your letter without fail. Well, what do you think of our little arrangement concerning your curtain, Varenka? It's charming, don't you think? Whatever I am doing – sitting at work, going to bed or waking up, I know that you are up there thinking about me, remembering me, and are yourself well and in good spirits. If you've lowered the curtain, that means: 'Good night, Makar Alekseyevich, it's bedtime!' If you've raised it, that means: 'Good morning, Makar Alekseyevich, did you sleep well?' or 'How are you today, Makar Alekseyevich? As for myself, thanks be to the Creator, I am well and happy!' Do you see, my little darling, what a skilful arrangement this is? You don't even need to write me letters! It's clever, isn't it? And what's more it was my idea. I'm rather good at these things, Varvara Alekseyevna, don't you agree?

I am able to report to you, Varvara Alekseyevna, my little mother, that last night, contrary to expectation, I slept in regular order and am accordingly most satisfied; it is always difficult to sleep in new lodgings one has just moved into; there is always something that is not quite right. I rose this morning as fresh as a daisy – happy and cheerful! What a wonderful morning it was, my dear. Our window had been opened; the sun was shining, the birds were chirruping, the scents of spring were wafting on the air, and all nature was wakening to life – well, and everything else was likewise in corresponding manner; everything was in order, spring-fashion. I even had some rather nice dreams today, and they were all about you, Varenka. I compared you to a bird of the air, made for the delight of human beings and as an ornament for nature. It suddenly occurred to me, Varenka, that we human beings who live in care and trouble ought to envy the carefree and innocent happiness of the birds of the air – well, and so on, and so forth; i.e., I continued to make similar far-fetched comparisons. I have a book

here, Varenka, which says the same sort of thing – all described in the greatest detail. I am writing this to you, little mother, because I have so many different dreams. And also because it's spring now: one's thoughts are pleasant, witty, fanciful, and one has such tender dreams; everything bears a rosy tinge. That's why I've written all this; though in fact I got it all out of my book. There the author displays the same desire in verses, and writes:

Why am I not a bird, a bird of prey?

Well, and so on, etcetera. There are various other thoughts in it, but God go with them. Now tell me, where were you going to this morning, Varvara Alekseyevna? I had not yet set off for the office, yet there you were, just like a bird in springtime, fluttering out of your room and across the yard, so small and sprightly. How happy it made me to see you! Oh, Varenka, Varenka, you mustn't be sad; tears will not help your sorrow; I know this, my little mother, I know it by experience. You are comfortable now, and your health has improved a little. Well, how is your Fedora? Oh, what a kindly woman she is! Will you write to me, Varenka, and tell me how you are getting along with her now and whether you are happy with everything? It's true that Fedora's a bit grumpy sometimes; but don't you pay any attention to that, Varenka. God be with her! She's such a kind one.

I have already written to you about the Teresa we have here – also a kind and reliable woman. And there was I getting so worried about our letters. How would they ever be delivered? And then, to our good fortune, the Lord sent us Teresa. She is a kind, meek, gentle woman. But our landlady is simply without mercy. She wears Teresa out with work as though she were an old rag.

My, what a slum I have landed in, Varvara Alekseyevna! Well, it's a lodging house! Before I used to live like a real hermit, you remember – peacefully, quietly; you could hear a pin drop. Here, on the other hand, there is nothing but noise, shouting, uproar! But then of course you don't know how everything is arranged here. Imagine, if you will, a long corridor, utterly dark and filthy. To your right there is a blank wall, and to your left nothing but doors and doors, like numbered hotel rooms, stretching away in a row. Well, these are for rent, and behind each number there is one little room; people live in them in twos or in threes. Don't expect things to be

tidy – it's a proper Noah's ark! However, the people seem all right: they're all educated, learned folk. There's a civil servant (he works in the literary department somewhere), a well-read man: he talks about Homer, Brambeus,* and various other of those authors of theirs, he talks about everything – a clever man! There are two officers who are forever playing cards. There's a naval warrant-officer; and an Englishman who's a teacher. Just wait, and I shall amuse you, little mother; in my next letter I will describe them satirically, i.e. tell you what they are like in every detail. Our landlady is a very small and very dirty old woman – all day long she goes about in her slippers and dressing-gown, and all day long she shouts at Teresa. I live in the kitchen, or rather it would be more correct to put it this way: right next door to the kitchen here there is a room (I should, perhaps, tell you that our kitchen is clean, light and excellently appointed), a small room, a modest little corner... i.e. to put it even better, the kitchen has three windows, and I have a partition that runs parallel with the transverse wall, making as it were another room, a supernumerary one; it is spacious and comfortable, there is a window, and everything – all conveniences, in fact. Well, that is my little corner. So, little mother, don't you go away with the idea that I'm hiding something and that there's more to it than what I've described; don't say to yourself: 'but it's a kitchen!' – it's perfectly true that I live in the kitchen, behind a partition, but that doesn't matter; I live apart from everyone, so-so, on the quiet. I have provided myself with a bed, a table, a chest of drawers and a couple of chairs, and have hung up an icon. It is true that there are better – possibly even much better – lodgings to be found; but convenience is what matters. And indeed I have done all this for the sake of my own convenience, and you must not think that it has been for any other purpose. Your window is opposite, across the yard; the yard is narrow, and one sees you passing – it is all more cheerful for a hapless fellow like myself, and it's cheaper, too. The lowliest room in our house here, with board, costs thirty-five paper rubles* a month. That's more than I can afford! But my place costs me only seven paper rubles, plus five silver rubles for board: that makes a total of twenty-four and a half, whereas before I was paying around thirty, and had to go without a good many things accordingly; I didn't even drink tea regularly, yet now I save enough to be able to afford both tea and sugar. You know, my darling, it is rather

embarrassing not to be able to afford to drink tea; the people here are all well-off, so one feels embarrassed. Varenka, one drinks tea for the sake of others, for form's sake, in order to keep up appearances; for myself I couldn't care less, I'm not fussy. Look at it like this: one needs something for ready cash, something for boots and something for clothes – do you think that leaves much over? It all has to come out of my salary. But I don't complain and am satisfied. It is sufficient. It has been sufficient for several years now; there is also the occasional perk. Well, goodbye, my little angel. I have bought a couple of pots of balsam and a potted geranium at that place – they didn't cost much. Are you fond of mignonette? They have mignonette, too. Do write and tell me; yes, you know, write as fully as you can. But don't get any false ideas, little mother, and don't worry about my having taken a room such as this. I say it again: it was convenience that made me do it, and convenience alone was what tempted me. After all, my dear, I am saving money, I am setting money aside; I have quite a tidy little sum. Don't get the notion that I am such a meek soul that a fly could knock me over. No, little mother, I'm a bright fellow, and I possess a strength of character fitting in one whose soul is resolute and untroubled. Goodbye, my little angel! I have written you nearly two pages, and I ought to have set off for work long ago. I kiss your fingers, little mother, and remain,

Your most humble servant and most faithful friend,
MAKAR DEVUSHKIN*

PS I ask you only one thing: please reply to me as fully as possible, my angel. With this letter I am sending you a pound of sweets; so eat them to your heart's content, and for heaven's sake do not worry about me or bear me any ill-will. Well, so goodbye then, little mother.

April 8

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Do you know that you have at last forced me into a quarrel with you? Upon my word, good Makar Alekseyevich, I find it hard to

accept your presents. I know what they cost you, what deprivations and denials to yourself of the very necessities of life they involve. How many times have I told you that I need nothing, nothing at all; that I have not the wherewithal to repay you for the good deeds with which you have showered me to date. And why these pots of flowers? I mean, the balsams are all right, but why the geranium? I have only to utter one unguarded word, as for example about that geranium, and immediately you go out and buy it; yet I am sure it was expensive, was it not? What wonderful flowers it has! Crimson, like little crosses. Wherever did you get such a pretty geranium? I have put it in the centre of the window, where it may best be seen; I shall put a bench on the floor and place the rest of the flowers on the bench; just wait until I, too, grow rich! Fedora dotes upon them; our room is now like paradise – so clean and bright! But listen – why sweets as well? Indeed, I guessed at once from your letter that all was not quite right with you – all those bits about paradise, and spring, and scents wafting, and birds chirping. What's this, I thought, it's poetry, isn't it? It's true, you know: all your letter lacks is a little poetry, Makar Alekseyevich! All the rest is there: the tender feelings, the rosy-tinted dreams! About the curtain – I never gave it any thought; I expect it must have got hitched up of itself when I was moving the pots of flowers; well I never!

Oh, Makar Alekseyevich! Whatever you say, however much you calculate your profits in order to deceive me, in order to prove that they are all spent on you alone, you will not deceive me and will not succeed in concealing anything from me. You are obviously depriving yourself of necessities for my sake. Whatever were you thinking of, for example, when you rented such a room? I mean, others are disturbing you, harrassing you; you're cramped and uncomfortable. You like seclusion, yet here you have heaven knows what all around you! Yet you could live much better than this, judging by your salary. Fedora says the way you used to live was better by far. Have you really spent all your life like this, in solitude, in hardship and joylessness, without a friendly word, renting corners from strangers? Oh, my good friend, how sorry I am for you! At least look after yourself, Makar Alekseyevich! You say that your eyes are growing weak – then do not write by candlelight; why write? I am sure that your devotion to your duty is already well known to your superiors.

Once again I beg you: please do not spend so much money on me. I know that you love me, but you are not well off... I also rose this morning in a cheerful frame of mind. I was so pleased; Fedora has been working for ages, and has managed to get me some work, too. I was so happy; I just slipped out to buy the silk, and then settled down to work. All morning my mood was as light as air, I felt in such good spirits! But now all my thoughts are black and sad again; my heart has done nothing but pine away.

Oh, what is to become of me, what will be my fate? The worst of it is that I am in a state of such uncertainty, that I have no future, that I cannot even guess what will become of me. I am afraid to look back, too. There is such misery there that its mere recollection is enough to make my heart tear at the seams.

Darkness is falling. I must be getting on with my work. There is much I should like to have written to you about, but I have no time – the work must be completed by a specified date. I must hurry. Of course I agree that letters are a good thing; they make life less tedious. But why do you never come to see us? Why, Makar Alekseyevich? It's not far for you to come, now, and you must occasionally have some free time. Do come and see us! I saw your Teresa. She looks so sickly; I felt sorry for her and gave her twenty copecks. Oh yes, I nearly forgot: you must write to me as fully as possible about all the details of your daily life and surroundings. What sort of people do you have around you, and do you get along with them? I very much want to know about all that. See that you do it, now, and write to me. Today I will hitch up a corner of the curtain intentionally. Go to bed a bit earlier; last night I saw your candle was lit until midnight. Well, goodbye. Today I feel nothing but anguish, tedium and sadness. It is simply that kind of a day! Goodbye.

Yours,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA*

April 8

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

Yes, my darling, yes, my dear, it seems that this is the kind of day that has fallen to my miserable lot! Yes; you have been poking

fun at me, an old man, Varvara Alekseyevna! It is, however, my own fault, entirely my own fault. In one's old age, with only a wisp of hair left on one's head, one should not embark on amours and dubious ventures... And I will add this, little mother: man is sometimes a strange creature, very strange. And saints above! He sometimes really gets carried away by the things he talks about! And what comes of that, what follows from it? Absolutely nothing follows from it, and what comes of it is such rubbish that the Lord preserve us from it! I am not angry, little mother; it is simply that it is very annoying to remember it all, annoying to think that I wrote such fanciful, stupid things to you. And I went to the office today such a strutting dandy, too; there was such a radiance in my heart. For no good reason I felt in a holiday mood; I felt cheerful! I set to work on my papers with zeal – but what came of that? When I looked around me a bit later, everything was just the same as before – grey and dingy. The same blotches of ink, the same desks and papers, and I, too, the same; as I had been, so exactly had I remained – so what had been the point of my flight on Pegasus? And what had been the cause of it all? The glimmer of sunshine and the bit of blue sky there had been? Was that it? And what kind of scents could there have been, when goodness only knows what may be lurking beneath our windows! All that was evidently the product of my foolish imaginings. After all, it does sometimes happen that a person goes astray in his feelings and writes down nonsense. It is caused by nothing other than excessive, stupid warmth of heart. I did not walk, but sooner dragged myself home; I had a headache, for no especial reason; it was all just one thing after another. (Perhaps the wind had given me a lumbago.) So overjoyed by the spring had I been that, like a fool, I had gone out in a thin overcoat. And you were wrong about my feelings, my darling! You interpreted their outpouring in quite the wrong way. It was fatherly affection that moved me, Varvara Alekseyevna, nothing but pure fatherly affection; for because of your bitter orphaned state, I take the place of a father to you; I say this from the bottom of my heart, in pure sincerity, as a relative. Whatever you may say, even though I am but distantly related to you, even though I am but a second cousin twice removed, none the less I am your relative, and am now your closest relative and protector; for there, where you had most right to seek protection and safety, you found treachery and insult. As regards the poetry, I must tell you, little mother, that it would

not be seemly for a man of my age to engage in the art of writing poems. Poetry is nonsense! Boys are thrashed in our schools for writing verses nowadays... that is how it is, my darling.

Varvara Alekseyevna, why do you write to me of comfort, quiet and other such things? My little mother, I am not a grumbler, neither do I make demands. Never have I lived better than I am doing at present; why should I be fussy in my old age? I am fed, clothed, and shod; so why should I go getting fancy ideas? I am not a count! My father was not of noble birth, and he had to support his entire family on less than the salary I earn. I am no molly-coddle! Though if truth be told, everything was much better in my old apartment; there was a bit more space, little mother! Of course, the room I have now is nothing to complain about, and is even in some respects more cheerful, and possesses, if you will, more variety; I have no objection to that – yet I still miss my old place. We old – or rather elderly – folk grow accustomed to old things as to something that is a part of us. The room was a small one; the walls were... well, what can one say? The walls were as walls usually are; they were not important, yet remembering my past like this fills me with sadness... It is strange – I feel distressed, yet the memories are almost pleasant ones. In my memory even the bad things, the things that sometimes vexed me, are somehow cleansed of what was bad and appear to my mind in an attractive light. We lived a quiet life, Varenka, I and my old landlady, who is now no longer alive. I remember that old woman of mine with sadness now! She was a good soul, and did not ask much for the room I rented from her. She was forever knitting bedspreads out of scraps on the longest needles you have ever seen; that was all she ever did. We shared the cost of our light and fuel, and so we used to work at the same table. She had a young granddaughter, Masha; I remember her as just a little girl, but she must be about thirteen now. She was such a naughty little girl, always laughing, always making us laugh; and thus we lived together, the three of us. In the long winter evenings we would sit down at the round table, drink a little tea, and then set about our tasks. And to keep Masha entertained and prevent her from being too naughty, the old woman would start telling stories. And what stories they were! Not only a child, but a grown man with his head on his shoulders would listen to them with delight. Goodness! I remember that I would light my pipe and listen with such pleasure that I would forget what I was doing. And the child,

our naughty little girl, would fall a-thinking, propping her rosy cheek in her hand, she would open her pretty little mouth and, if the story were the slightest bit scary, snuggle up as close as she possibly could to the old woman. It gave us such pleasure to watch her; and we would not notice that the candle had burned down, nor hear the intermittent howling of the gale and the raging of the snow outside. It was a good life we had, Varenka; and that way we lived for nigh on twenty years. But how I have been blabbing away! Such matters possibly hold no interest for you, and it is indeed not all that cheery for me to recall it, especially now that it is twilight. Teresa is busy with something, I have a headache and a bit of a backache and I have such strange thoughts, it's as if they were aching, too – I'm in a sorry state today, Varenka! What is this you write, my darling? How can I come and see you? My little dove, what would people say? I mean, I should have to cross the yard, the people here in the house would see me, they would start asking questions – there would be gossip, rumours would circulate, people would give the whole business another meaning. No, my little angel, it would be better if I were to see you tomorrow at the all-night service; that would be more sensible and safer for us both. Little mother, do not judge me too severely for having written you a letter like this; having read it over, I can see that it is quite incoherent. I am an old, uneducated man, Varenka; I had no proper schooling when I was young, and now if I try to start studying afresh there is nothing that will go into my head. I confess, little mother, that I am no master of description, and I know without needing others to point it out to me and make fun of me that were I to try to write something a little more on the entertaining side, I should merely end up with a heap of rubbish. I saw you at your window today, saw you lowering the blind. Goodbye, goodbye, may God look after you!

Goodbye, Varvara Alekseyevna.

Your disinterested friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

PS My dear, I can't write satires about anyone now. I have grown too old, Varvara Alekseyevna, to show my teeth in vain! People would just laugh at me – as the Russian proverb says: 'The man who digs a pit for another will end up in it himself.'

April 9

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Now then – are you not ashamed, my friend and benefactor, Makar Alekseyevich, to indulge in all this sorrowing and fretting? Can it really be that you have taken offence? Oh, I know that I am often incautious, but I did not think that you would take my words as a malicious joke. You may be assured that I shall never have the effrontery to make jokes about your years or your character. This has all come about because of my frivolity, and even more because I am dreadfully bored, and what will one not do from boredom? I assumed, you see, that you were joking in your letter. I became terribly sad when I saw that you were displeased with me. No, my kind friend and benefactor, you will be wrong if ever you suspect me of insensitivity or ingratitude. I know how to treasure in my heart all the things that you have done for me, protecting me from wicked people, from their persecution and hatred. I shall pray for you always, and if my prayers reach God and Heaven attends them, you shall be happy.

I feel very unwell today. I am feverish and shivering in turn. Fedora is very worried about me. It is silly of you to be too embarrassed to come and see us, Makar Alekseyevich. What business is it of others? We are friends, and that is that... Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich. I have nothing to write about now, and indeed I cannot write: I feel terribly unwell. I beg you once again not to be angry with me and to be assured of the constant esteem and devotion with which I have the honour to remain,

Your most humble servant,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

April 12

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

Oh, my little mother, whatever is the matter with you? Each time you frighten me in the same way. In each of my letters I tell you to look after yourself, to wrap yourself up, not to go out in the bad weather, to observe caution in all things – but, my little angel,

you do not listen to me! Oh, my little dove, you are like some child! I mean, you are frail, frail as a little wisp of straw, I know it. The slightest little breeze, and you go and catch a chill. So you must be on your guard, take care of yourself, avoid risks and not bring your friends grief and despondency.

You express the wish, little mother, to learn the details of my everyday life and all that surrounds me. With joy I hasten to carry out your wish, my darling. I shall begin from the beginning, dearest: that way it will be more orderly! In the first instance, the staircases at the front side of our house are positively handsome; the main staircase is particularly so – it is clean, light, wide, all cast-iron and mahogany. On the other hand, don't inquire about the back stairs: they are winding, damp and dirty, with steps broken and the walls so greasy that your hand sticks when you lean against them. On every landing there are chests, broken chairs and cupboards, old clothes hung up, windows with panes knocked out; tubs stand around filled with all kinds of evil stuff: dirt, sweepings, eggshells and fishes' bladders; a bad smell... in short – nasty.

I have already described the arrangement of the rooms; there is no denying that it is a convenient one – that is true, but for some reason they are rather stuffy; it's not that there's a bad smell as such – there's rather, if I may put it this way, a slightly rotten, sweet-sour smell. The first time you smell it it doesn't seem awfully prepossessing, but it's really nothing at all; you have only to be in our house for a minute or two and it passes, and you don't notice it passing because you yourself smell bad – your clothes, your hands, everything... well, and so you get used to it. The siskins in our house are dying off like anything. The warrant-officer is presently buying our fifth – they simply can't live in our air, and that's the truth of it. Our kitchen is a large one, spacious and light. It's true that it does get a bit smoky in the mornings, when people are cooking their fish or beef and pouring and spilling stuff everywhere, but in the evenings it's heaven. In our kitchen there's always some old underwear hanging on a line; and since my room is close by, in fact almost adjoins the kitchen, the smell does bother me a bit; but never mind: one lives and makes the best of it.

In our house, Varenka, the noise begins very early in the morning: the noise of people getting out of bed, walking about, knocking on doors – all who have to are bestirring themselves, in

order to go to work or to engage in their own business; everyone sets about having morning tea. Our samovars are for the most part owned by the landlady; there are not enough of them, so we all use them by turn; and woe betide anyone who takes his teapot out of turn! I did that the first time, and... but why write about it? I got to know everyone here at the same time. The warrant-officer was the first person whose acquaintance I made; he is an open fellow, and he told me everything about himself: his father, his mother, his sister, who is married to an assessor in Tula,* and about the town of Kronstadt. He promised to take me under his wing and invited me to have tea with him right then and there. I found him in the room where the people in our house usually play cards. There I was served with tea and those present insisted that I should gamble with them. Whether they were laughing at me or not, I don't know; all I know is that they themselves had been playing all night, and when I went in they were still at it. I saw chalk, and cards; there was so much smoke in the room that it stung one's eyes. I said I didn't want to take part, and they at once observed that I was talking philosophy. After that no one talked to me at all; of which I was truly glad. I shall not go and see them now; all they do is gamble, nothing but gamble! The government clerk who works in the literary department also holds gatherings in the evenings. Yes, and they are pleasant and modest, innocent and delicate; it is all on a refined footing.

Well, Varenka, I shall also just remark in passing that our landlady is a thoroughly unpleasant woman, a regular old witch. You have seen Teresa. Well, what would you say she is like? As thin as a plucked, sick chicken. There are only two domestic staff in the house: Teresa and Faldoni,* the landlady is manservant. I do not know, perhaps he has some other name as well, but he only answers to this one; everyone calls him by it. he is a red-haired man, some kind of Finn – crooked-figured, pug-nosed, a coarse and disgusting fellow: he is forever quarrelling with Teresa, they almost come to blows. In general, I find life here not entirely a good thing... If only everyone went to bed and slept at the same time – but that never happens. There are always people sitting up late gambling somewhere, and sometimes things happen which I should be too embarrassed to tell you about. However, I'm used to it now, though I wonder how family men can manage to live in such a Sodom. There is a whole family of poor wretches of some sort who live in a

room they rent from our landlady, only it is not near the other rooms, but on the other side of the building, in a corner by itself. Humble folk! No one ever hears anything about them. They live in the one room, dividing it with a partition. he is some out-of-work government clerk, who lost his job seven years ago for some misdemeanour. His name's Gorshkov; he's a little, grey-haired man; he goes about in such stained, worn-out clothes that it hurts just to look at him; they're in a much worse state than mine! He's a pathetic, sickly looking fellow (I sometimes meet him in the corridor); his knees shake, his hands shake, his head shakes, from what illness God only knows; he's shy, afraid of everyone, and goes about furtively; I know I'm timid occasionally, but he's even worse. His family is made up of his wife and three children. The oldest child, a boy, looks just like his father, the same sickly type. His wife must once have been not at all bad-looking, you can see it even now; she goes around in such pitiful rags, the poor wretch. I heard that they have got themselves into debt with the landlady; she is none too friendly towards them. I also heard that Gorshkov is in some trouble or other, and that that is why he lost his job... whether he's to be put on trial, whether he's being prosecuted, or whether he's being made the subject of an investigation, I really can't tell you. One thing is certain, and that is that they're poor – my, how they're poor! Their room is always quiet and peaceful, as though there were no one living there. You don't even hear their children. You never ever see the children out enjoying themselves, playing around, and that's a bad sign. I happened to pass their door one evening; it had grown somewhat unusually quiet in the house; I could hear sobbing, then whispering, then sobbing again, as if they were crying in there, so quietly and pitifully that my heart almost broke, and afterwards all night long the thought of those poor wretches would not leave me, so that I couldn't get to sleep properly.

Well, goodbye, my little treasure of a friend, Varenka! I have described it all for you to the best of my ability. All day I have thought of nothing but you. My heart has been pining for you, my dear. After all, my darling, I know that you have no warm coat. These St Petersburg springs with their wind and rain mixed with snow – they'll be the death of me, Varenka! Such temperate weather* that the Lord preserve us! Don't be too hard on my writing, darling; I have no style, Varenka, no style at all. If only I

had just a little bit! I write what wanders into my mind, so as to provide you with some diversion. If only I had done some studying, everything would be different; but what kind of studying have I done? Not even enough to scrape by on.

Your constant and faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

April 25

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Today I met my cousin Sasha! What a terrible thing to happen! She too will be ruined, poor woman! I also heard from the certain quarter that Anna Fyodorovna is still making enquiries about me. I do not think she will ever stop trying to make my life a misery. She says she wants to *forgive me*, to forget all that has been, and that she will come to visit me. She says that you are no relation to me at all, that she is a closer relation, that you have no right to enter into our family affairs and that I ought to be ashamed and embarrassed to live on your charity and your salary... she says I have forgotten her hospitality, that she probably saved mother and me from death by starvation, that she fed us and looked after us and was out of pocket on our account for more than two-and-a-half years, that in addition to all that she agreed to overlook a debt we owed her. And she hadn't a good word to say for mother! Oh, if poor mother only knew what they have done to me! God sees it!... Anna Fyodorovna says I was too stupid to and on to my luck, that she took me down the right path, that she is not to blame for any of the other things that have happened and that it was I who was either unable or, possibly, unwilling to stand up for my own honour. But who was to blame for that, Great God in Heaven? She says that Mr Bykov was entirely in the right, and that a man doesn't simply go and marry the first woman who... but why should I write about that? It is cruel to hear such slanders, Makar Alekseyevich! I do not know what is happening to me right now. I am trembling, weeping, sobbing; it has taken me two hours to write you this letter. I thought that at least she would admit her guilt in my regard; and look how she is behaving now! For God's sake, don't worry, my friend, my only well-wisher! Fedora exaggerates everything; I am

not ill. I simply caught a slight cold yesterday when I went to Volkovo for mother's funeral. Why did you not come with me? I told you that I wanted you to, so badly. Oh, my poor, poor mother, if only you were able to rise from your coffin, if only you knew, if only you could see what they have done to me!...

V. D.

May 20

Darling Varenka!

I send you a few grapes, my darling; they are said to be good for those who are convalescing, and the doctor recommends them for the alleviation of thirst – especially for thirst, as it were. You expressed a wish for roses the other day, little mother; so now I send you some herewith. Do you have an appetite, my darling? – that is the most important thing. Anyway, thank God that all that is over and done with, and that our misfortunes are also drawing to a decisive close. Let us offer thanks to Heaven! But as for books, I have so far been unable to obtain them anywhere. There is said to be one particularly good book, written in a very fine style; it is supposed to be good, I have not read it myself, but everyone here sings its praises. I have ordered it, and have received the promise that it will be dispatched to me. Only will you read it? In my experience, you are hard to please in these matters; it is difficult to satisfy your taste, I know it well, my little dove; I expect what you want is poetry, lovers' complaints, amours – well, I shall obtain poetry for you, I shall obtain everything; they have a notebook with verses copied in it there.

As for myself, I am well. Please do not worry about me, little mother. What Fedora told you about me is all nonsense; you tell her that she's been spreading lies about me, the gossip!... I certainly have not sold my new uniform. I mean, judge for yourself, what on earth would induce me to go and do that? They tell me that I'm to receive forty rubles in bonus pay soon, so why should I need to sell my uniform? Don't you let yourself be upset, little mother; she is mistrustful, that Fedora, she has a suspicious mind. We shall be all right, my little dove! Only, my angel, you must get better, do you hear, you must get better, and not make an old man unhappy. Who told you that I have grown thin?

Slander, more slander! I am thoroughly healthy and have put on so much weight that I have a bad conscience about it – I am stuffed full to the gullet; all I want is for you to get better! Well, goodbye my little angel; I kiss each one of your fingers and remain,

Your eternal, constant friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

PS Oh, my darling, why do you write this again?... What game are you playing with me? How can I visit you so often, little mother, how? I ask you. Perhaps under cover of darkness; but it hardly gets dark at nights now,* at this time of the year. You know, my little mother, little angel, I hardly left your side during all the time you were ill, when you lay unconscious; even now I don't really know how I managed to do all that I did; and afterwards I stopped visiting you, because people had started to get nosy and ask questions. Even without all that, there had been some kind of gossip going around here. I put my faith in Teresa; she knows how to hold her tongue; but even so, little mother, imagine how it will be when they find out everything about us, what they will think and what they will say. So you must be strong, my darling, and wait until you are better again; and then we shall arrange a rendezvous somewhere out of doors.

June 1

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich,

I so much want to do something nice for you in return for all the effort and trouble you have put yourself to because of me, and in recognition of your love for me, that I have finally determined to get the better of my reluctance to rummage around in my locker and fish out my exercise-book, which I am sending you now. I began it at a happy time in my life. You often used to ask with curiosity about the way I used to live, about my mother, about Pokrovsky, about the time I spent in the home of Anna Fyodorovna and about my recent troubles, and you were so impatient in your wish to read this exercise-book, in which I had the idea, heaven knows why, of jotting down random moments of my life, that I have no doubt my parcel will bring you great enjoyment. As for myself, however – reading it over made me feel sad. I seem to have aged

twice over since the time I wrote the last line of these notes. They were all written at different times. Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich! I feel terribly low just now, and I am frequently tormented by insomnia. What a tiresome convalescence!

V. D.

I

I was only fourteen years old when Father died. My childhood was the happiest time of my life. It began not here, but far away, in the provinces, in the wilds. Father was the manager of the enormous estate belonging to Prince P., in the province of T. We lived in one of the Prince's villages, and our life was quiet, unobserved, and happy... I was ever such a playful little child; all I ever did was run around the fields, the woods and the orchard, and no one ever paid me the slightest attention. Father was constantly preoccupied with business matters, and my mother took care of the household; no one tried to give me any education, for which I was grateful. I can remember that from the earliest morning onwards I would be running off to the pond, or the wood, or the haymaking, or the reapers – and never mind that the sun was baking down, that I had wandered heaven only knows where away from the village, was covered in scratches from the bushes, and had torn my clothes – I would be given a scolding at home later on, but I did not care. And I think that I should have been truly happy if it had been necessary for me to spend my entire life never leaving the village and staying in the same place. As it turned out, I had to leave my native corner while still a child. I was only twelve when we moved to St Petersburg. Oh, with what sadness I recall our melancholy preparations. How I wept as I said goodbye to all that was so dear to me. Father began to shout at me, and Mother cried; she said that there was nothing for it, that Father's business demanded it. Old Prince P. had died. The inheritors had dismissed Father from his position. Father had some money which was being circulated among private individuals in St Petersburg. In the hope of easing his financial difficulties, he decided it would be best for him to be present here in the capital himself. I found all this out from Mother later on. We settled here on the St Petersburg Side* and lived in the same place right up until Father's death. How difficult I found it to accustom myself to my new life! We went to St Petersburg in the

autumn. The day we left the village was such a bright, warm, clear one; the work on the farms was drawing to a close; enormous stacks of grain were already piling up on the threshing floors, and shrill flocks of birds were wheeling about; everything was so serene and cheerful. Yet here, as we arrived in the city, we were greeted by rain, a damp autumn drizzle, foul weather, sleet and a host of new, unfamiliar faces – hostile, malcontent, and angry! Somehow we settled in. I remember that we were all in such a state of excitement, constantly fussing about as we set up our new home. Father was, as usual, not at home, and Mother had not a single free moment – I was completely ignored. I felt sad when I got up in the morning after my first night in our new quarters. Our windows looked out on to some kind of yellow fencing. The street was in a perpetual state of mire. Passers-by were few, and they were always well wrapped up, everyone felt the cold so. In our home a terrible sense of depression and tedium would reign for whole days on end. We had practically no relatives or close acquaintances. Father was on bad terms with Anna Fyodorovna. (He owed her a certain amount of money.) People did come to see us quite frequently on business, but they usually spent the time arguing, making a fuss and shouting. After each visit Father would become so ill-pleased and angry; I can remember that he used to pace the floor hour after hour, frowning, and never exchanging a word with anyone. At such times Mother did not dare to speak to him, and she kept silent. I would sit down somewhere in a corner with a book, as quiet as a mouse, not daring to make the slightest movement. Three months after we arrived in St Petersburg, I was sent to a girls' boarding-school. How sad I felt initially at being among strangers! Everything was so cold, so unfriendly – the governesses were such shouters, the girls were such scoffers, and I was such a savage. It was so strict and severe! The fixed times for everything, the communal eating, the obnoxious teachers – at first I found all that utterly tormenting. I could not sleep there, either. I would cry all night, all the long, cold, dreary night. In the evenings the girls usually repeated their lessons aloud, or learned them by heart; I would sit with my French conversations or vocabulary, not daring to stir a limb, and constantly thinking about our bit of home, about Father and Mother, about our old nurse, about nurse's stories... Oh, how depressed I would feel! I would find myself remembering even the most trivial objects in the house with affection. I would think and

think: how good it would be to be at home now! I would sit in our little room, by the samovar, together with my own folk; it would be so warm, so good, so familiar. How tightly, how warmly I would embrace Mother, I would think. I would think and think, and quietly start to cry from heartbreak, choking back the tears, and forgetting all my vocabulary. It was always impossible for me to learn my lesson for the following day; all night I would dream of the male teacher, the madame, the girls; all night I would repeat my lessons in my sleep, but next day my head would be empty. I would be made to kneel, and given only one dish for my main meal. I was such a dull, miserable creature. At first the other girls kept laughing at me, teasing me, putting me off when I was saying my lessons, pinching me when we walked in lines to take our main meal, or tea, made complaints about me to the governess for no reason at all. On the other hand, what a paradise it was when nurse would come for me on Saturday evenings. I would hug the old woman in an ecstasy of joy. She would help me to put on my coat and shoes, and see that I was well wrapped up, and then would be unable to keep up with me as we walked, and I would chatter and chatter to her, telling her everything. I would arrive home cheerful and joyful, and would hug all the members of our household fiercely, as though I had been away for ten years. Gossip, conversations and stories would begin; I would say hello to everyone, laugh, giggle, skip and run about. I would have serious talks with Father about my studies, about our teachers, about the French language, about Lomond's grammar* – and we would all be so pleased, so happy. Even now I feel happy just remembering those moments. I did all that I could to apply myself to my studies and thus please Father. I could see that he was sacrificing the last of his money for my sake, and was struggling to get by, God knew how. With every day that passed he grew more gloomy, more ill-humoured, angrier; his character had been quite ruined; his business affairs were not going well, and there was a multitude of debts. Mother would be afraid to cry, afraid to say a word, in case she angered Father; she grew ill; became thinner and thinner and developed a nasty cough. I would arrive home from my boarding-school to such sad faces; Mother would be crying quietly to herself, and Father would be angry. There would be admonitions and rebukes. Father would say that I had brought him no joy, no consolation; that they were depriving themselves of the last that they owned because of me, yet still I could not speak French; in

other words, all his failures, all his misfortunes, all, all were unloaded on to Mother and me. And how could he torment poor Mother? My heart used to break just at the sight of her: her cheeks had grown sunken, her eyes had retreated into their sockets, her face bore a consumptive hue. I was the one who caught it more often than not. It would always start with trivia, but would subsequently develop into heaven only knows what; often I did not even understand what it was all about. What was there that was not the matter? That I could not speak French, that I was a great numbskull, and that the headmistress of our boarding-school was a stupid, negligent woman, who paid no attention to our morals; that Father still could not find a job, and that Lomond's grammar was no good, Zapolsky's* was far better; that they had thrown away a lot of money on me for nothing; that it was plain to see I was unfeeling, with a heart of stone – in other words, I, poor girl, struggled with all my might to do my lessons and vocabularies, but was guilty for everything, responsible for everything! And this was not at all because Father did not love me: he loved both Mother and me deeply. It was just what had happened to his character.

Poor Father's worries, troubles and failures tortured him in the extreme: he became mistrustful and splenetic; he was frequently close to despair, began to neglect his health, caught a cold and suddenly fell ill. His sufferings did not last long; he died so abruptly and so without warning that for several days we were all stunned by the blow. Mother was in a kind of rigid trance; I even feared for her sanity. No sooner had Father died than his creditors appeared before us as if they had sprung from the ground; they hurled themselves upon us in a crowd. We had to give them everything we possessed. Even our little house on the St Petersburg Side, the one Father had bought six months after we moved to St Petersburg, was sold. I don't know how the rest of the business was settled, but we ourselves were left without a roof over our heads, without anywhere to go, and without our daily bread. Mother was suffering from a wasting disease, we were unable to provide for ourselves, and before us lay ruin. At that time I was only just fourteen years old. It was at this juncture that Anna Fyodorovna paid us a visit. She kept saying that she was some kind of landowner, and also that she was some kind of relative of ours. Mother, too, said that Anna Fyodorovna was a relative of ours, only a very distant one. Anna Fyodorovna had never come to see us while Father was alive. She

appeared with tears in her eyes, said that she had the greatest sympathy for us; she commiserated with us in our loss and in our wretched position, and added that Father himself had been to blame: that he had not lived according to his means, had overreached himself and had placed too much faith in his own powers. She confessed a desire to get to know us better, offered to forget our mutual disagreements; and when Mother declared that she had never had any bad feelings for her, she shed a few tears, took Mother into a church and ordered a requiem mass for the 'darling man' (that was how she referred to Father). Having done that, she solemnly made her peace with Mother.

After many lengthy preambles and forewarnings, Anna Fyodorovna, having depicted to us in vivid colours our wretched position, our orphaned state, our hopelessness and helplessness, invited us, as she put it, to take shelter with her. Mother thanked her, but was for a long time unable to make up her mind; but as there was nothing to be done, and no other way of making any satisfactory arrangements, she finally announced to Anna Fyodorovna that we would accept her proposal with gratitude. I can still now remember the morning on which we moved from the St Petersburg Side to Vassilevsky Island. It was a clear, dry, frosty autumn morning. Mother was in tears; I felt terribly sad; my breast felt as though it were bursting, and my heart ached with a dreadful, inexplicable pain... It was a distressing time...

II

Initially, until we – Mother and I, that is – had grown accustomed to our new abode, we both found life in Anna Fyodorovna's house a strange and in some ways terrifying experience. Anna Fyodorovna lived in a house of her own on the Sixth Line. There were only five habitable rooms in the house. Three of them were occupied by Anna Fyodorovna and my female cousin Sasha, whom she was bringing up – Sasha was just a child, an orphan who had no father or mother. We lived in one of the remaining rooms, and the other, next to ours, housed a poor student named Pokrovsky, Anna Fyodorovna's lodger. Anna Fyodorovna lived very well, better than one might have supposed; but the sources of her capital were mysterious, as were the tasks that kept her busy. She was always bustling about, always preoccupied; went out by carriage or on foot

several times a day; but what she did, what preoccupied her and why, I was never able to fathom. The circle of her acquaintances was large and varied. She had a constant stream of visitors, and Lord only knows what kind of people they were, always calling on some sort of business and only for a moment or two. Mother would always take me off to our room as soon as the doorbell rang. Anna Fyodorovna was always terribly angry with Mother because of this, and was forever saying that we were too proud, proud beyond our means, and that it would be a matter if we had something to be proud about, and kept going on like that for whole hours on end. At that time I did not understand these accusations of pride; it is only now that I think I know, or can at least surmise, why Mother was unable to make up her mind to go and live in Anna Fyodorovna's house. Anna Fyodorovna was a malicious woman; she tormented us constantly. It is to this day a mystery to me why she invited us to go and live with her. At the outset she was reasonably pleasant to us, but then, when she realized that we were helpless and had nowhere to go, she displayed her true colours. Later on she became quite affectionate towards me, affectionate in a vulgar sort of way that verged on flattery, but initially I had to put up with everything that Mother had to put up with. She was on at us every minute of the day; all she ever did was remind us that she was our benefactress. She would introduce us to strangers as her poor relatives, a helpless widow and orphan whom she had given shelter in her home out of mercy, for the sake of Christian charity. At table she would watch every mouthful we took, but if we did not eat, there would be more trouble: she would say that we were turning up our noses at what she offered us, that it was not good enough for us, that we were ungrateful. She constantly criticized Father, saying that he had wanted to be better than other people, and a fat lot of good that had done him; he had left his wife and daughter to sink or swim, and if they had not had a female relative with a charitable, compassionate, Christian soul, they might, God only knew, have perished of hunger on the street. The things she said! Listening to her, one felt less bitterness than revulsion. Mother was constantly in tears; her health was getting worse from day to day, she was visibly wasting away, yet all the while she and I were working from morning to night, taking in orders for sewing, which thoroughly displeased Anna Fyodorovna; she kept repeating that her home was not a fashion shop. But we had to clothe ourselves, we had to put

money by for unforeseeable expenses, we simply had to have money of our own. We were saving just in case it proved possible to move somewhere else in time. But doing the work, Mother lost what little good health she had left: she was growing weaker with each day that passed. Her illness, like a canker, was visibly undermining her life and was bringing her close to the grave. I saw it all, felt it all, suffered it all: it was all happening before my eyes! Day followed day, and every one of them was the same as the others. We lived a quiet life, not like a life in town at all. Anna Fyodorovna gradually calmed down as she began fully to realize the extent of her power. But no one ever dared to contradict her. Our room was separated from her half of the house by a corridor, and next to us, as I have already mentioned, lived Pokrovsky. He taught Sasha French and German, history, geography – ‘all the sciences’, as Anna Fyodorovna used to say, providing him in return for this with board and lodging; Sasha was a nimble-minded girl, though she was playful and naughty; at that time she was thirteen. Anna Fyodorovna made it known to Mother that she would consider it not a bad idea for me to start lessons with Pokrovsky too, since they were not teaching me properly at my boarding-school. Mother readily agreed, and for a whole year I took lessons from Pokrovsky together with Sasha. Pokrovsky was poor – a very poor young man; his health did not permit him to follow any continuous course of study, and it was merely out of habit that we referred to him as ‘the student’. He lived modestly, peacefully, and quietly, and no sound of him could be heard from our room. His appearance was rather odd; so awkwardly did he walk, so awkwardly did he bow, and so strangely did he speak that at first I could not look at him without laughing. Sasha was forever playing pranks on him, especially when he was giving us our lessons. Also, he had an irritable disposition – he constantly got angry, losing his temper over the merest trifles, shouted at us, complained about us and frequently went off to his room in a rage, without having completed the lesson. Left to himself, however, he would sit poring over his books for days on end. He had a lot of books, and they were all expensive, rare ones. He gave lessons in a few other places as well, and received some kind of payment for them; as soon as he had any money, he would at once go out and buy books. In time I got to know him better, more intimately. He was the kindest and most worthy of men, better than any I have ever met. Mother respected him deeply. He

eventually became my best friend – after Mother, that is, of course. At first, grown-up girl or not, I caused just as much mischief as Sasha, and for hours on end we would rack our brains trying to think of ways to tease Pokrovsky and wear out his patience. He was really comical when he lost his temper, and for us this was a great source of fun. (I am truly ashamed to remember that now.) On one occasion we tormented him about something almost to the point of tears, and I distinctly heard him whisper: ‘Wicked children!’ I suddenly grew embarrassed; I felt ashamed, and sickened, and sorry for him. I remember that I blushed to the roots of my hair, and with tears in my eyes begged him to calm himself and not be offended by our stupid pranks; but he closed the book, leaving our lesson unfinished, and went off to his room. I spent all that day in an agony of remorse. The thought that we children had reduced him to tears by our cruel behaviour was unbearable to me. I redi-
ance that we had been waiting for him to burst into tears; that was what we had wanted. We had succeeded in exasperating him beyond the limits of his endurance; we had compelled him, poor, unfortunate man, to remember his cruel destiny. I lay awake all night with vexation, sadness and remorse. They say that remorse brings relief to the soul – on the contrary. I do not know how it was, but vanity also managed to get mixed up in my unhappiness. I did not want him to view me as a child. By that time I was already fifteen. From that day onward I began to torture my imagination, creating thousands of plans to make Pokrovsky alter his opinion of me. But now I was afflicted by a chronic timidity and shyness: in my present situation I could not for the life of me make my mind up about anything, and I confined myself to dreams alone (and God knows, what dreams they were!). But I did stop playing pranks with Sasha. Pokrovsky stopped losing his temper with us; but that was not sufficient for my vanity. I shall now say a few words about the strangest, most curious and most pathetic human being of all those it has been my fortune to meet. I speak of him now, at precisely this moment in my notes, because until that time I had scarcely paid him any attention – but now everything that concerned Pokrovsky suddenly acquired a special interest for me. There sometimes used to appear in our household a little old man, grey-haired, shabbily dressed, mud-bespattered, awkward and clumsy – in short, impossibly strange. From a first glance at him one might have thought he was ashamed of something; he looked as though he had

something on his conscience. This made him constantly huddle himself up and make faces to himself in a peculiar sort of way; he had such odd mannerisms and made such strange grimaces that one might, without being very much mistaken, have supposed him to be not in his right mind. He would come to our house and stand in the entrance hall outside the glass doors, not daring to come inside. If he saw one of us going past – Sasha or myself, or one of the servants whom he knew to be kindly disposed towards him – he would immediately start waving, beckoning to himself, and making various signs, and it was only when one nodded to him and called to him – the prearranged signal that there were no visitors in the house and that he might enter whenever he wished to – only then would the old man quietly open the door, smile with delight, rub his hands with satisfaction and proceed straight on tiptoe to Pokrovsky's room. This was Pokrovsky's father. I later discovered most of the details of this poor old man's story. He had once had a government position somewhere, had no abilities whatsoever and had occupied the lowliest and most insignificant post in the service. On the death of his first wife (the mother of our 'student' Pokrovsky), he had taken it into his head to marry a second time, and married a tradesman's daughter. His new wife turned the household upside down; she would leave no one alone, took everyone in hand. At that time our 'student' Pokrovsky was only a child of about ten years old. His stepmother hated him. But fate smiled on little Pokrovsky. The landowner Bykov, who knew the government clerk Pokrovsky and had once been his benefactor, took the child into his care and found him a place in some school or other. He took an interest in the boy because he had known his dead mother, who as a girl had received the good favours of Anna Fyodorovna and had been married by her to the government clerk Pokrovsky. Moved by generosity, Mr Bykov, a friend and intimate acquaintance of Anna Fyodorovna's, had given the sum of five thousand rubles as a dowry for the bride. Where that money had gone, no one knew. That was the story as Anna Fyodorovna told it to me; the 'student' Pokrovsky never liked talking about his family circumstances. They say that his mother was very good-looking, and I find it strange that she should have made such a poor marriage to such an insignificant man... She died when she was still quite young, about four years after the marriage. From school young Pokrovsky went to some gymnasium or other, and then on to

university. But Mr Bykov, who made very frequent visits to St Petersburg, did not stop his patronage with that. Because of his disturbed state of health, Pokrovsky was unable to continue his studies at the university. Mr Bykov introduced him to Anna Fyodorovna with his own personal recommendation, and thus the young Pokrovsky was taken into the household as a dependant, on condition that he teach Sasha everything that might be required. Meanwhile, old Pokrovsky, demented by his wife's cruelty, abandoned himself to the very worst of vices, and was almost constantly drunk. His wife used to beat him, banished him to the kitchen and reduced him to a state in which he grew accustomed to her beatings and did not complain of her maltreatment of him. He was not yet really all that old, but his self-destructive inclinations had practically turned him into a dotard. The only sign of decent human feeling he ever showed was his boundless love for his son. People used to say that the young Pokrovsky was the spitting image of his dead mother. Might it not have been the memory of his kindly first wife that had inspired the ruined old man's heart with such an infinite love for him? The old man could speak of nothing but his son, and called to see him without fail two times a week. He did not dare to call more often, because the young Pokrovsky could not stand his father's visits. Of all the young man's faults, the principal and most grievous was unquestionably his lack of respect for his father. It should, of course, be added that the old man could on occasion be the most intolerable creature in the world. For one thing, he was horribly inquisitive, and for another, by his comments and questions, which were invariably of a most trivial and incoherent kind, he constantly interfered with his son's studies and would sometimes even turn up drunk. Little by little, the son managed to wean his father away from his vices, his inquisitiveness and his compulsive talking, and finally reached a stage where the old man obeyed him, as though he were an oracle, in all things, and did not dare to open his mouth without his son's permission. The poor old man could not sufficiently admire and dote upon his Petenka (as he called his son). Whenever he called to visit him, he nearly always had a worried, timid look, probably because he did not know how his son would receive him. He would usually spend a long time hesitating whether to come in or not, and if I chanced to be there, he would question me for about twenty minutes, asking me about 'Petenka' and how his health was, what kind of mood he

was in, whether he was engaged in any important study, what he was actually doing – whether he was writing or absorbed in reflection. When I had sufficiently raised his spirits and put his mind at rest, the old man would finally make up his mind to come in and very quietly, very gingerly, he would open the door, and begin by putting his head round it; if he saw that his son was not in a bad temper and nodded to him, he would slowly enter the room, take off his overcoat and his hat – which was always squashed, full of holes, and ragged-brimmed – and hang both on a hook, performing the action slowly and inaudibly; then he would sit down carefully on a chair somewhere, never taking his eyes off his son, following his every movement in an attempt to guess the frame of mind his Petenka was in. If his son was even slightly in a bad mood and the old man was able to observe this, he would at once rise from his seat and explain: ‘I only dropped in for a moment, Petenka. I’ve been out for a long walk, I was passing, and looked in to take a rest.’ And then silently and obediently he would take his hat and overcoat, slowly open the door once again and go out, smiling to his son, smiling forcedly in order to keep to himself the misery that seethed within him, and not show it to his son.

When, on the other hand, his son received his father well, the old man would be beside himself with joy. His pleasure would make itself visible in his face, his gestures, and his movements. If his son said anything to him, the old man would invariably get up slightly from his chair and reply in a quiet, servile tone bordering on reverence, always trying to use the most refined, that is, the most ridiculous expressions. But he had no gift for words: he would always grow confused and lose his nerve, since he did not know where to put his hands or to put himself, and would whisper his side of the conversation to himself for a long time afterwards, as though he were trying to correct himself. If, on the other hand, he had succeeded in answering well, the old man would preen himself, straighten his waistcoat, tie and jacket and assume an air that suggested he knew his own worth. It occasionally happened that he recovered his spirits to such an extent and grew so emboldened that he slowly rose from his chair, went over to the bookshelf, took down a book at random, and read aloud from it right there and then, whatever he had chanced to select. All this he did with an air of pretended indifference and detachment, as though he could always behave in such a lordly fashion with his son’s books, as

though he found nothing remarkable about his having been treated kindly by him. I once, however, chanced to witness how frightened the poor man became when Pokrovsky asked him not to touch the books. He grew confused, began to fuss around, replaced the book upside down, then tried to put it back the right way up, turned it round and replaced it with its spine facing inward, smiled, blushed and was at a loss how to cover up his crime. By his counselling, Pokrovsky managed to wean the old man away from his self-destructive habits, and as soon as he saw him sober, let us say, on three successive occasions, then the next time the old man visited him he would give on parting a twenty-five copeck piece, a fifty-copeck piece, or more. He would sometimes buy him boots, a tie or a waistcoat. The old man would be as proud as a turkey-cock in his new clothes. Sometimes he would come to our room. He would bring cockerel-shaped honey-cakes, and apples, for Sasha and myself, and would spend all the time telling us about Petenka. He would ask us to study attentively and be obedient, saying that Petenka was a good son, an exemplary son and, what was more, a learned son. As he did so, he would wink at us ridiculously with his left eye and make such comical faces that we were unable to restrain our hilarity and laughed at him for all we were worth. Mother was very fond of him. But the old man hated Anna Fyodorovna, even though in her presence he was as quiet as a mouse.

Soon I stopped taking lessons with Pokrovsky. He still viewed me as a child, a naughty little girl, on a par with Sasha. This hurt me considerably, as I was doing my utmost to make up for my previous behaviour. But no one paid any attention to that. That irritated me more and more. I practically never spoke to Pokrovsky outside of lessons, nor could I speak. I blushed, was confused, and afterwards wept in a corner from disappointment.

I do not know how all this would have ended, had not a certain strange circumstance contrived to bring us close to each other. One evening, when Mother was talking to Anna Fyodorovna, I quietly entered Pokrovsky's room. I knew that he was not at home, and I do not really know why I took it into my head to go in. Until that time I had never paid him even the briefest visit, even though we had been living next door to each other for more than a year. On this occasion my heart beat so violently that I thought it might

burst out of me. I looked around me with intense curiosity. Pokrovsky's room was very shabbily furnished; it was not very tidy. Five long bookshelves containing books had been nailed to the walls. The table and the chairs were heaped with papers. Books and papers! I suddenly had a strange thought, and at the same time a nasty sense of disappointment took hold of me. It seemed that my friendship and my loving heart were of little account to him. He was educated, while I was stupid and knew nothing, had read nothing, not a single book... At this point I cast an envious glance at the long shelves sagging with books. I was seized with disappointment, depression, a kind of rage. I conceived a desire, which I acted on at once, to read his books, every single one of them, as quickly as possible. I am not sure, but perhaps I thought that if I learned everything he knew, I should be more worthy of his friendship. I rushed to the first shelf; without thinking, without hesitating, I seized the first dusty old tome that fell into my hands and, blushing, trembling with fear and agitation, carried the stolen book off to my room, having decided to read it at night, by the glow from the night-light, when mother was asleep.

Great, however, was my disappointment when, on regaining our room, I hurriedly opened the book and discovered that it was some ancient, semi-decomposed, utterly worm-eaten treatise in Latin. I lost no time in taking it back. Just as I was about to replace the book on its shelf, I heard a noise in the corridor, and someone's footsteps, quite close. I tried to be as quick as I could, but the wretched book had been so firmly wedged in its row that when I took it out all the others displaced themselves and closed ranks in such a way that there was now no room for their former companion. I had not the strength to squeeze the book back in. But I did push the other books back as hard as I was able. The rusty nail by which the shelf was fixed to the wall and which seemed to have been awaiting precisely that moment in order to snap, snapped. The shelf collapsed at one end, and the books went noisily scattering all over the floor. The door opened, and Pokrovsky entered the room.

I should observe that he could not abide anyone interfering with his possessions. Woe betide anyone who laid a finger on his books! Consider, then, my sense of horror when those books – large and small, of every imaginable format, size and thickness – came hurtling down from the shelf and went careering and fluttering

under the table, under the chairs, all over the room. I would have made my escape, but it was too late. 'I'm finished,' I thought, 'finished! It's all up with me, I'm for it! I'm being silly and naughty like a child of ten years old: I'm just a stupid little girl! A big idiot!' Pokrovsky flew into the most dreadful rage. 'Well, that's all that was wanting!' he cried. 'Well, aren't you ashamed to play silly pranks like this?... Won't you ever learn any sense?' And he rushed to pick up the books. I began to stoop down in order to help him. 'Don't, don't!' he cried. 'You would do better not to go where you have not been invited.' Then, however, slightly mollified by my submissive behaviour, he continued more quietly, in his customary teacher's voice, taking advantage of his customary teacher's authority: 'Well, when are you going to learn some self-control and start to behave sensibly, for a change? I mean, just look at you, you're not a child, you're not a little girl any longer – you're fifteen years old!' And at this point, doubtless in an endeavour to make sure that I really was no longer a little girl, he cast a glance at me and blushed to the roots of his hair. At first, I did not understand; I stood in front of him, staring at him in amazement. He got up, approached me with an air of embarrassment, grew horribly confused, and started to speak: he was evidently apologizing for something, perhaps for only now having noticed that I was such a big girl. At last I understood. I can't remember what happened to me then; I grew confused, flustered, blushed even deeper than Pokrovsky, covered my face with my hands and ran out of the room.

I did not know what there was left for me to do, or where to hide my head in shame. The mere fact that he had caught me in his room! For three entire days I was unable to bring myself even to look at him. I kept blushing to the point of tears. The strangest, most ridiculous thoughts kept whirling about in my head. One of them, the wildest, was a desire to go to him, have it out with him, confess everything to him, frankly tell him all and convince him that I had behaved not as a stupid little girl, but with good intentions. I had almost made up my mind to do this, but, thank God, found that I did not possess the necessary courage. I can imagine what a fool of myself I should have made! Even now I have pangs of conscience at the memory of the whole episode.

A few days later Mother suddenly fell dangerously ill. She lay in

bed for two days, and on the third night she developed a fever and delirium. I had already lost one night of sleep looking after her, sitting by her bedside, bringing her water to drink and giving her her medicine at the prescribed times. By the second night I was completely exhausted. At times sleep overcame me, my eyes went dark, my head grew dizzy, and I was constantly on the point of collapsing with weariness; but Mother's feeble groaning kept rousing me, and I would start and wake up for a moment before slumber once again got the better of me. I was in torment. I do not know how it was – I cannot remember – but at the agonizing moment of sleep's struggle with wakefulness a terrible vision, a monstrous dream visited my confused head. I woke up in horror. The room was in darkness, the night-light was going out; suddenly the whole room was bathed in stripes of light, which at one moment flashed across the wall and at the next disappeared entirely. For some reason I grew dreadfully afraid, I was attacked by a sense of horror; my fantasy had been aroused by the terrible dream I had had; anguish constricted my heart... I leapt up from my chair and let out an involuntary shriek, brought on by my sense of claustrophobic, agonized terror. At that moment the door opened, and Pokrovsky came into our room.

The only thing I remember is that when I regained consciousness I was in his arms. He sat me down in a chair, gave me a glass of water, and showered me with questions. I do not remember what I replied. 'You are ill, too, you are very ill,' he said taking my hand. 'You have a fever, you are damaging yourself, you must be kinder to your health; make your mind easy. Lie down, go to sleep. I shall wake you in two hours' time, try to get a little rest... Lie down, I say, lie down!' he continued, not letting me say a single word in objection. Tiredness had robbed me of the last of my strength; my eyes were closing from weakness. I lay down on the sofa, determined to sleep for only half an hour, and slept until morning. Pokrovsky did not wake me up until it was time for me to give Mother her medicine.

At about eleven o'clock the following evening when, having managed to rest a little in the afternoon, I was once again preparing to sit on the sofa by Mother's bedside, this time firmly resolving not to fall asleep, Pokrovsky knocked at the door of our room. 'It'll be boring for you sitting up on your own,' he said. 'Here's a book for

you; take it; you won't get so bored then.' I took it; I don't remember what book it was; I hardly glanced at it then, even though I did not sleep all night. A strange inner agitation would not allow me to sleep; I was unable to remain in the same place; several times I got up from the *chaise-longue* and began to walk about the room. A kind of inner satisfaction spread itself throughout my entire being. I was so delighted by Pokrovsky's attentions. I took pride in his anxiety and concern about me. All night I thought and dreamed. Pokrovsky did not look in again; I knew he would not come, and I made guesses about the following evening.

Next evening, when everyone in the house had gone to bed, Pokrovsky opened his door and began to talk to me, standing on the threshold of his room. I do not remember now a single word of what we said to each other; all I remember is that I was shy and confused, that I was annoyed with myself and awaited the end of our conversation with impatience, even though I had desired it with all my heart, had spent the whole day dreaming about it and preparing my questions and replies... The beginnings of our friendship dated from that evening. Throughout the entire duration of Mother's illness we spent several hours of every night in each other's company. Little by little I overcame my shyness, although after each of our conversations I would always find something to be annoyed with myself about. However that may have been, I none the less saw with secret delight and proud satisfaction that he was forgetting his wretched books because of me. Quite casually, almost in jest, our conversation once touched on the subject of their fall from the shelf. It was a strange moment – I was almost *too* open and candid; the heat of the moment and a strange enthusiasm carried me away, and I confessed everything to him... that I wanted to study, to know a few things, that I found it annoying to be regarded as a little girl, a child... I repeat that I was in a very strange mood; my heart was soft, there were tears in my eyes – I hid nothing and told him everything, everything – about my feelings of friendship for him, about my desire to live with him united in love, to console him, to calm him. He gave me a strange look which contained both embarrassment and amazement, and did not say a word. I suddenly felt terribly hurt and sad. It seemed to me that he did not understand me, that he might even be laughing at me. I suddenly started to cry like a child, sobbing, unable to control myself; it was as though I had succumbed to a kind of fit. He seized my hands,

kissed them, held them to his breast, tried to reassure me, to console me; he was deeply moved. I do not remember what he said to me, only that I both wept and laughed, and once more wept, blushed, and was unable to utter a word for joy. Yet for all my emotional turmoil, I observed that Pokrovsky was still tense and embarrassed. He seemed to be unable to stop wondering at my animation, my enthusiasm, my so suddenly manifested, warm, ardent feelings of affection for him. Perhaps initially he had been merely curious; subsequently his lack of resolve disappeared, and he accepted, with the same simple directness as I, my attachment to him, my friendly words and my attention, and responded to it all with the same degree of attention, as kindly and amicably as if he were my sincere friend, my own brother. My heart felt so warm, so good!... I made no attempt to conceal my feelings from him, I kept nothing back; he saw it all, and with every day that passed became more attached to me.

And truly, I do not remember what we talked about during those sweet but tormenting hours when we would rendezvous by night, by the trembling flame of the icon-lamp, practically by the very bedside of my poor, sick mother... We talked about everything that came into our heads, that burst from our hearts, that begged to be given expression – and we were almost happy... Oh, that was a sad and joyful time – both at once; and it is with both sadness and joy that I now recall it. Memories, whether bitter or joyful, are always a source of torment; that, at least, is how I find it; but even this torment is sweet. And when the heart grows heavy, sick, anguished and sad, then memories refresh it and revive it, as on a dewy evening after a hot day the drops of moisture refresh and revive the poor, withered flower which has been scorched by the afternoon sun.

Mother's health began to improve, but still I continued to sit by her bedside at night. Pokrovsky would often lend me books; I read them, at first merely in order not to fall asleep, then with greater attention, then with avidity; suddenly there was revealed to me much that was new and that had previously been unknown or unfamiliar to me. New thoughts and new impressions came flooding into my heart in an instant, overwhelming rush. And the greater the agitation, the turmoil and effort these new sensations cost me, the more attractive I began to find them, the more sweetly they made

my soul tremble. At once, in a flash they came thronging into my heart, denying it all rest. A strange chaos began to disturb my entire being. But this spiritual onslaught was unable to put me completely off balance. I was in too much of a dreamlike condition, and that was my saving.

When Mother's illness was over, our evening rendezvous and long conversations came to an end; we sometimes succeeded in exchanging words, often trivial and of little significance, but I took pleasure in giving everything its own special meaning, its own particular, implied value. My life was full, and I was happy – calmly, quietly happy. In this fashion several weeks went by...

One day old man Pokrovsky came to see us. He prattled on to us for a long time, and was unusually animated, cheerful and loquacious; he laughed, made jokes in his own peculiar way, and finally solved for us the mystery of his enraptured state by revealing to us that in exactly a week's time it would be Petenka's birthday, on which occasion he would most certainly pay him a visit; he would put on a new waistcoat, and his wife had promised to buy him a new pair of boots. In short, the old man was thoroughly happy and went prattling on about everything that came into his head.

His birthday! That birthday gave me no peace either by day or by night. I determined to show Pokrovsky that I cared for him by giving him a present. But what? I finally had the idea of giving him some books. I knew that he wanted the complete collection of Pushkin's works in the most recent edition,* and I resolved to buy it. I had about thirty rubles of my own, earned from needlework. I had been saving this money in order to buy a dress. I immediately sent our old cook Matryona to find out what a complete Pushkin cost. Alas! The price of all eleven volumes, including the cost of the bindings, was at least sixty rubles. Where would I get the money? I racked my brains, but could not think what to do. I did not want to ask Mother. She would, of course, have helped me; but then everyone in the house would have found out about our present; what was more, the present would have turned into a token of gratitude, a kind of repayment for the year of effort Pokrovsky had devoted to me. I wanted to give him the present alone, in secret from everyone else. And for his efforts with me I wanted to be forever in his debt, without any repayment whatsoever apart from my

friendly feelings for him. At last I conceived a way out of the problem.

I knew that at the second-hand bookstalls of the Gostiny Dvor it was sometimes possible, with a little bargaining, to buy books at half price, scarcely used and almost completely new. I decided to go down to the Gostiny Dvor. So it was; on the following day it turned out that both Anna Fyodorovna and ourselves needed certain purchases. Mother was slightly unwell, and Anna Fyodorovna very conveniently felt too lazy, so I was the one who had to do all the errands, and I set off together with Matryona.

As luck would have it, I found a complete edition of Pushkin very quickly – it was one in a very nice binding. I began to bargain. At first the stallowner demanded more than was charged in the bookshops; but after a while, though not without difficulty, and walking away several times, I succeeded in persuading him to reduce the price to only ten silver rubles. The bargaining was such fun!... Poor Matryona could not understand what had got into me, and why I wanted to buy so many books. But horror! My entire capital amounted to only thirty paper rubles, and the stallowner would not agree to part with the books more cheaply. Finally I began to implore him, beseech him, and in the end got my way. He yielded, but only by two and a half rubles, and he swore that he was only doing this as a special favour to me, since I was such a nice lady; he would not do it for anyone else. I was short of the necessary amount by two and a half rubles! I could almost have wept with frustration. But in my misery a most unexpected circumstance came to my aid.

Not far from me, at another table of books, I saw old man Pokrovsky. He was surrounded by four or five stallowners; they had succeeded in utterly bewildering him, bothering him to death. Each of them was offering him his wares, and what was there not on offer, and what did he not wish to buy! The poor old man stood in their midst like one of the downtrodden, at a loss to know what to do with all that was being offered him. I went up to him and asked him what he was doing here. The old man was very glad to see me; he was fond of me to the point of distraction, perhaps no less fond than he was of Petenka. ‘Oh, I’m buying some books, Varvara Alekseyevna,’ he replied to me. ‘I’m buying some books for Petenka. You see, it’s his birthday soon, and he likes books, so I’m buying

some for him...' The old man always expressed himself in a comical sort of way, and now, what was more, he was in the most dreadful state of confusion. Whatever he asked the price of, it was always one silver ruble, two or three silver rubles; he had by this time given up asking the prices of the larger books, but was merely throwing a covetous glance at them, turning over their pages with his fingers, feeling them in his hands and putting them back in their places. 'No, no, that's too expensive,' he would say in a low voice, 'but perhaps over here there'll be something,' and at that point he would begin to rummage through thin folios, songbooks and almanacs; these were all very cheap. 'But why do you want to buy things like that?' I asked him. 'They're all the most terrible rubbish.' 'Oh no,' he replied, 'no, just look at what nice books there are here; very, very nice books!' These last words he drawled in a singsong voice so plaintively that he seemed on the point of bursting into tears with frustration that the 'nice books' were so expensive; I thought that at any moment a tear would roll down his pale cheeks on to his red nose. I asked him if he had much money. 'Look, here's what I have,' he said, taking out all his money, wrapped up in a greasy scrap of newspaper. 'I've half a ruble, a twenty-copeck bit and twenty copecks in copper.' I immediately hauled him off to my secondhand bookseller. 'Here,' I said, 'these eleven books only cost thirty-two and a half rubles; I have thirty; if you add two and a half we can buy all these books and give them to your son together.' The old man nearly fainted with joy, emptied out all his money, and the bookseller loaded on to him the whole of our common library. My old man filled all his pockets with books, took some in his hands, and the rest under his arms, and carried them all off to his home, having promised to bring them all to me in secret the following day.

On the following afternoon the old man came to visit his son, sat with him for an hour or so as he usually did, then looked in to see us and sat down beside me with a most comical enigmatic expression. First, with a smile, and rubbing his hands with proud satisfaction at being in possession of a confidentiality, he told me that all the books had been brought to us in the greatest secrecy and were being kept in a corner of the kitchen under Matryona's supervision. Then the conversation naturally turned to the day we were waiting for; the old man talked for some time about how we would present the gift, and the more deeply he became engrossed in his subject, the more obvious it became to me that he had

something on his mind, something he was unable, did not dare, was even afraid to talk about. I bided my time and remained silent. The secret joy, the secret satisfaction which I had had no difficulty in reading from his strange mannerisms, his grimaces, his winking of his left eye, had vanished. From moment to moment he was becoming more and more restless and uneasy; finally he could restrain himself no longer.

‘Listen,’ he began timidly, in a low voice. ‘Listen, Varvara Alekseyevna... Do you know what, Varvara Alekseyevna?...’ The old man was in a dreadfully confused state of mind. ‘Look: when his birthday arrives, you take ten of the books and give them to him yourself, from you, I mean; then I’ll just take the eleventh one and give it to him from me, separately, as it were; that way you will have something to give him, and I will have something to give him.’ At this point the old man grew flustered and fell silent. I gave him a quick look; he was awaiting my verdict in timid expectancy. ‘But why do you want us to give him our presents separately, Zakhar Petrovich?’ ‘Well, Varvara Alekseyevna, you see... it’s, well, I mean...’ In short, the old man grew embarrassed, blushed, unable to finish his sentence or to make any further headway.

‘It’s like this, you see,’ he explained finally. ‘I sometimes indulge myself, Varvara Alekseyevna... that’s to say, I have to inform you that I am constantly indulging, practically always indulging myself... I follow practices that are unhealthy... that’s to say, you know how cold it can get out on the streets, and sometimes, too, there are various troubles that come along, or something unpleasant happens, and sometimes I can’t help it, I indulge myself and sometimes drink too much. Petenka doesn’t like that at all. You see, Varvara Alekseyevna, he loses his temper, shouts nasty things at me and gives me lectures on how I ought to behave. So you see I want to show him by means of my present that I’m mending my ways and starting to behave decently. It’s taken me a long time to save up this money to buy a book, because I hardly ever get any money except for what Petenka gives me sometimes. He knows that. Consequently, when he sees the use to which I have put my money, he will realize that I have done it for him alone.’

I started to feel terribly sorry for the old man. I thought for a moment. He was looking at me uneasily. ‘Listen, Zakhar Petrovich,’ I said, ‘you give him all of them!’

‘All of them? You mean all the books?...’ ‘Yes, all the books.’ ‘From me?’ ‘Yes, from you.’ ‘From me alone? You mean, in my name?’ ‘Yes, in your name...’ I thought I was expressing myself very clearly, but for a long time the old man could not fathom my meaning.

‘Well, yes,’ he said, after pausing to reflect for a while. ‘Yes, that would be very good, but what will you give him, Varvara Alekseyevna?’ ‘Oh, I won’t give him anything.’ ‘What?’ the old man cried in a tone that verged on fear. ‘So you won’t give Petenka anything, you don’t want to give him anything?’ Now the fear was real; at that moment I think the old man would have been prepared to give up his proposal so that I could be enabled to give his son a present. He had a kind heart. I assured the old man that I should be glad to give Petenka something, only I did not wish to deprive him, the father, of doing so. ‘If your son is happy,’ I added, ‘and you are pleased, then I will be pleased too, because secretly in my heart I will feel as though I had also given him the present.’ At this the old man grew much calmer. He stayed another two hours with us, but during all that time he was unable to sit still; he kept getting up, fussing about, talking incessantly, playing with Sasha, kissing me on the sly, pinching my arm, and making faces at Anna Fyodorovna when her back was turned. In the end, Anna Fyodorovna chased him out of the house. In short, the old man abandoned himself to his delight to a degree that was probably unprecedented for him.

On the morning of Pokrovsky’s birthday the old man appeared at exactly eleven o’clock, having come straight from church, his overcoat properly darned, and wearing, as he had promised, a new waistcoat and new boots. He had a bundle of books under both arms. Just then we were all sitting in Anna Fyodorovna’s drawing-room having coffee (it was Sunday). I think the old man started off by saying that Pushkin was a very good poet; then, losing his thread and becoming confused, he suddenly changed the subject and began talking about how it was necessary to behave well, and about how if a person did not behave well, that meant he was self-indulgent; how bad habits could be a man’s undoing and destroy him; he even cited several fatal examples of intemperance, and concluded by saying that for some time now he had entirely mended his ways, and that he was presently behaving in an exemplary manner. He said that even previously he had sensed the correctness of his son is

admonitions, that he had sensed it all for a long time now and had taken it all to heart, but that only now had he begun to abstain. As a proof of this, he was making his son this gift, bought with money he had managed to save over a long period of time.

As I listened to the poor old man I was unable to keep myself from both laughter and tears; he certainly knew how to tell a lie when the occasion demanded! The books were taken into Pokrovsky's room and placed on one of the shelves. Pokrovsky immediately guessed the true state of affairs. The old man was invited to stay to dinner. We were all in such lively spirits that day. After dinner we played cards and forfeits; Sasha was in a playful, excited mood, and I was not much better. Pokrovsky was affectionate to me, and kept trying to find an opportunity of speaking to me alone, but I would not yield to his wishes. That was the best day of that entire four-year period of my life.

But now it is the sad, painful memories that come to mind; the story of my dark days is beginning. Perhaps that is why my pen is starting to move more slowly, as if it were refusing to write any more. That is why, perhaps, I have with such enthusiasm and such fondness gone over in my mind the most insignificant details of my insignificant life in those happy days of mine. They were so brief, those days; they were succeeded by sorrow, black sorrow, and God alone knows when it will end.

My misfortunes began with Pokrovsky's illness and death.

He fell ill two months after the latest events I have described. During those two months he had been tirelessly waging a struggle for the means of subsistence, for he still had no reliable position. He was offered a schoolmaster's job somewhere; but he had an aversion for that trade. He was unable, on account of his poor health, to serve in a government position anywhere. In addition, he would have had to wait too long for the first instalment of his salary. In short, Pokrovsky met with lack of success wherever he turned; he was losing his good spirits. His health was going from bad to worse, but he gave it no attention. Every day he would go out in his thin overcoat to chase up his business, to ask and beg for a job somewhere, anywhere – something that caused him inner torture; he would get his feet wet, be soaked in the rain and, at last, had to take to his bed, from which he never got up again... He died

in the depths of autumn, at the end of October.

I practically never left his room throughout the entire duration of his illness, looking after him and nursing him. I frequently did not sleep for whole nights on end. He was seldom in possession of his faculties; frequently he would be in delirium; he would talk about God knows what; his job, his books, about me, about his father... at this time, too, I heard much about his circumstances which previously I had not known and had not even guessed. During the early period of his illness everyone used to give me rather strange looks; Anna Fyodorovna would shake her head. But I used to look everyone straight in the eye, and they stopped frowning upon my concern for Pokrovsky – or at least Mother did.

Sometimes Pokrovsky would recognize me, but this was rare. For much the greater part of the time he was unconscious. Sometimes for whole nights on end he would talk to someone at great length, his words unclear and obscure, his hoarse voice resonating hollowly in his cramped room as in a coffin; at such times I would grow afraid. On his last night, in particular, he was like a man in a frenzy; he suffered horribly, in a misery of anguish; his groans tormented my soul. Everyone in the house was in a state of fright. Anna Fyodo rovna kept praying that God would take him quickly. The doctor was summoned. The doctor said that by morning the patient would certainly be dead.

Old man Pokrovsky spent the whole night out in the passage, right by the door to his son's room; some bast-matting had been spread on the floor for him there. Every minute or so he would enter the room; it was terrible to see him. So crushed by grief was he that he seemed completely inane and insensate. His head shook with fear. He was quivering all over, and kept whispering something to himself, carrying on some private argument with himself. I thought he might go crazy with grief.

Towards dawn, worn out by mental agony, the old man fell into an inert torpor. At some time between seven and eight in the morning the son's death throes began; I woke the father. Pokrovsky was fully conscious, and said farewell to all of us. It was strange; I could not weep, but my soul was torn to pieces.

It was, however, his last moments which caused me the greatest degree of anguish and torture. With his stiffening tongue he kept

asking for something over and over again, but I could not make out any of his words. My heart nearly broke with affliction. For a whole hour he was restless, kept fretting about something, trying to make some sign or other with his frigid hands, and then once more began plaintively asking for something in a hoarse, hollow voice; but his words came out as incoherent sounds, and once again I was unable to make out what he was trying to say. I brought every member of our household to his bedside, I gave him water to drink, but all he did was keep sadly shaking his head. At last I realized what he wanted. He was asking me to draw the window-curtain and open the shutters, probably in a desire to take one last look at the day, at God is world and the sun. I tugged the curtain to one side; but the incipient day was sad and melancholy, like the poor, fading life of the dying man. There was no sun. The clouds had spread the sky with a misty shroud; it was so rainy, gloomy, melancholy, that sky. A drizzling rain had found its way to the window-panes and was sluicing them with rivulets of cold, dirty water; all was dark and dreary. The wan daylight only just managed to penetrate the room, scarcely vying with the trembling glow of the lamp that had been lit in front of the icon. The dying man gave me a look of utter melancholy and shook his head. A minute later he was dead.

The arrangements for the funeral were made personally by Anna Fyodorovna. A coffin of the very plainest kind was bought, and a drayman hired. In order to meet the expenses, Anna Fyodorovna laid claim to all the dead man's books and personal effects. The old man argued with her, kicked up a row, took back from her as many books as he could, stuffed all his pockets with them, put them into his hat, or wherever else he could think of, went around with them for a whole three days and would not even part with them when he had to go to church. For all those days he was like someone unconscious, like someone who has been stupefied, and kept fussing near the coffin with a strange solicitude: now he would straighten the wreath on the corpse, now he would light or snuff the candles. It was evident that his thoughts could not rest on anything in an ordered manner. Neither Mother nor Anna Fyodorovna were present in the church during the funeral service. Mother was sick, and Anna Fyodorovna, though she had got herself all ready to go, had quarrelled with old man Pokrovsky and had remained at home. The only people present were the old man and myself. During the service I was attacked by a sense of terror – a kind of premonition

of the future. I could barely manage to stay on my feet in church. Finally the coffin was shut, nailed up, placed in the drayman's cart and hauled away. I accompanied it only to the end of the street. The drayman was making his horse go at a trot. The old man ran after him, weeping loudly, his wailing shaken and punctuated by his running. The poor fellow had lost his hat and had not stopped to pick it up. His hair was sodden with rain; the wind was getting up; the sleet was lashing and stinging his face. The old man seemed insensible to the foul weather, and ran wailing from one side of the cart to the other. The skirts of his threadbare coat fluttered in the wind like wings. Books peeped from every one of his pockets; in his arms he was carrying an enormous tome, to which he clung tightly. Passers-by would remove their hats and cross themselves. Some people stopped and stared in wonder at the poor old man. Every so often books would fall out of his pockets and land in the mud. People would stop and point to them; he would pick them up and then scramble off in pursuit of the coffin once more. At the corner of the street an old beggar woman tagged along after him, keeping him company. At last the cart turned the corner and disappeared from view. I went home. When I got there, I threw myself on Mother's breast in a terrible state of anguish. I pressed her in my arms as close as I possibly could, kissed her and sobbed violently, anxiously nestling against her as though in my embraces seeking to retain my last friend, and not surrender her to death. But death was already overshadowing poor Mother...

June 11

How grateful I am to you for our walk to the islands yesterday, Makar Alekseyevich! How fresh and pleasant it is there, such greenness! It is so long since I saw green nature; when I was ill I kept thinking that I was going to die, and that my death was certain; imagine, then, what I experienced yesterday, how I felt! Do not be too cross with me for being so sad yesterday; I felt very good, very much at ease – but for some reason at those moments of my life when I feel best I am always sad. As for my crying, that was just nonsense; I myself do not know why I am forever crying. My emotions are painful and exasperating; I have a morbid sensibility. The sky was pale and cloudless, the sun was setting, the evening was quiet – all that – yet I do not know how it was: yesterday my

mood made me experience everything as being painful and tormenting, so that my heart overflowed and my soul begged for tears. But why am I writing you all this? These are things that communicate themselves to the heart only with difficulty, and to communicate them to others is even harder. But you, perhaps, will understand me. Sadness and laughter at the same time! Truly, what a good man you are, Makar Alekseyevich! Yesterday you really looked into my eyes in order to read in them what I was feeling, and you were delighted by my enthusiasm. Whether it was a shrub, an avenue of trees, or a stretch of water – you were there; so nobly you stood before me, making yourself look handsome, and constantly glancing into my eyes as though you were showing me your estate. That proves you have a good heart, Makar Alekseyevich. It is for that that I love you. Well, goodbye. I'm not well again today; yesterday I got my feet wet and have caught a cold; Fedora is also unwell with something, so together we make a pair of invalids. Do not forget me, come and see me more often.

Your

V. D.

June 12

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove,

Why, little mother, there was I thinking you were going to describe everything we saw yesterday in proper verses, yet all you have produced is one single small sheet of prose. I say this because although you do not say much in your little letter, it is none the less uncommonly well and pleasingly described. The natural surroundings, the various rural scenes, and all the rest about feelings – you really have described all that very well. You see, I have no talent for that kind of thing. Even though I fill ten pages with my scribbling, nothing comes of it. I am unable to describe anything. I have already tried. My dear, you tell me that I am a good man, lacking in malice, incapable of harming his fellow creatures and possessing an understanding of the Lord is grace as it is manifested in nature, and you end by showering me with various forms of praise. All that is true, little mother, all that is completely true; I really am as you say, I know it myself; but when a man reads

the kind of thing you write, his heart is moved, and then various painful thoughts come into his mind. But now listen to me, little mother, while I tell you something, my dear.

I was only seventeen when I first went into the service – soon I will have spent more than thirty years in this walk of life. Well, indeed, I have worn out enough dress uniforms in my time; I have grown to man's estate, acquired some shrewdness, and seen something of people; I have lived, and I can say that I have lived in the world, to the extent that once I was even nominated to receive a medal. Perhaps you will not believe me, but I assure you that this is so. And what became of it, little mother? Evil men brought it all to nothing. But I will tell you, my darling, that even though I may be an ignorant man, a stupid man, my heart is the same as anyone else's. Do you know what an evil man did to me, Varenka? It is shameful to tell what he did – you will ask why he did it. He did it because I am a meek little soul, because I am a quiet, a good little soul! I did not appeal to his taste, and so he let fly at me. It began with him saying things to me like 'You are this and that, Makar Alekseyevich'; then this turned into: 'Oh, it is no good asking Makar Alekseyevich!' And finally this became: 'It's all Makar Alekseyevich is fault, of course.' You see, my darling, how it went; everything was laid at Makar Alekseyevich is door; the name of Makar Alekseyevich became a watchword throughout our entire department. And it was not enough that they made me into a watchword, into a term of abuse, almost – they latched on to my boots, my uniform, my hair, the shape of my body: none of these were to their liking, they must all be changed. And I mean, all this has been repeated every single day of the week since God knows when. I have grown accustomed to it, because I can grow accustomed to anything, because I am a meek man, because I am a little man; but, I ask, what is the reason for it all? What wrong have I ever done anyone? Have I stolen promotion from anyone? Have I ever slandered anyone to the higher-ups? Asked for a bonus I did not deserve? Made up tales? It would be unjust of you even to think of such a thing, little mother. Why would I ever do anything like that? Just look at me, my darling. Do I look as though I had a leaning for perfidy and ambition? So why have such disasters befallen me, in the name of God? After all, you consider me a worthy man, and you are immeasurably better than all of them, little mother. I mean, what is the greatest civic virtue? Yevstafy

Ivanovich said the other day in a private conversation I had with him that the most important civic virtue is to know how to make a lot of money. He said, jokingly (I know he was joking), that moral education consists merely in learning how not to be a burden on anyone; and I'm not a burden on anyone! My crust of bread is my own; it's true that it's a plain crust of bread, at times even a dry one; but there it is, earned by my labours and consumed lawfully and unexceptionably. Well, what can one do? I mean, I know that the copying I do is not much of a job; yet, even so, I am proud of it: I work in the sweat of my brow. So what is wrong with the fact that I earn my living by copying? Is copying a sin? 'He just copies documents,' they say. 'That rat of a government clerk makes his living by copying!' Yet what is dishonourable about it? My handwriting is clear, well-formed and pleasant to look at, and His Excellency is satisfied with it; I copy his most important documents for him. Of course, I have no literary style, I mean, I know I have none, curse it; that is why I have not succeeded in rising in the service, and why even now, my darling, I write to you in this plain manner, with no frills, just as the thoughts come into my heart... All this I know; and indeed, if everyone were to start being an author, who would do the copying? That is the question I ask you, and I beg you to answer it, little mother. Well, so now I am aware that I am necessary, that I am indispensable, and that a man is silly to be upset by non sense. All right, let me be a rat, since they've found a resemblance! But this rat is needed, this rat is of use, this rat is relied upon, and this rat receives a bonus – that's the sort of rat it's! But enough of this subject, my darling; I did not really wish to speak of it, but got carried away a little in the heat of the moment. All the same, it is pleasant to do oneself justice from time to time. Goodbye, my darling, my little dove, my kind consoler! I will come and see you, I promise I will; I shall call on you, my treasure. And in the meantime, don't pine. I shall bring you a book. Well, goodbye, Varenka.

Your affectionate well-wisher,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 20

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

I write to you in haste, I am in a hurry, trying to finish some work on time. Look, this is what I have to tell you; it is possible for you to make an advantageous purchase. Fedora says that a man-friend of hers is selling a dress uniform, as good as new, some underwear, a waistcoat and a cap, and all for practically nothing, she says; so why don't you buy them? After all, you are not too badly off just now, you have some money; you yourself have told me so. Enough of your miserliness, now, please: I mean to say, these are all essential items. Just take a look at yourself, at the old clothes you are going about in. Shame on you! They are covered in patches. You have no new things; I know you have none, even though you assure me that you have. Heaven only knows what you have done with them. So please do as I say, and buy these clothes. Do it for me; if you love me, then buy them.

You have sent me a gift of some linen; but listen, Makar Alekseyevich, you are ruining yourself. I mean, it's no joke, what you have spent on me – a fearful amount of money! Oh, how you love to be extravagant! I don't need all those things; they were quite unnecessary. I know that you love me, I am convinced of it; truly, it is superfluous to remind me of it with gifts, gifts which it is painful for me to accept from you, since I know how much they cost you. Once and for all – desist, do you hear? I beg you, I implore you. Makar Alekseyevich, you ask me to send you the continuation of my notes; you want me to finish them. I do not even know how I managed to write what I did! But I have not the strength now to talk about my past; I don't even want to think about it; I grow frightened by all those memories. Talking about my poor mother, who left her poor child in the clutches of those monsters is most painful of all to me. My heart bleeds at the mere recollection. All that is still so fresh in my memory; I have not had time to reflect, still less to compose myself, even though it all happened more than a year ago. But you know all about it.

I told you about the thoughts that are currently in Anna Fyodorovna's head; she is accusing me of ingratitude and will accept no blame for her association with Mr Bykov. She wants me to go and live in her house; she says that I am living on charity, that I am on the slippery slope. She says that if I return to her she will take it upon herself to sort out everything with Mr Bykov and compel him to make amends for all that he has done to me. She

says that Mr Bykov wants to give me a dowry. Let them be! I am just as happy here with you, near my good Fedora, who with her devotion to me reminds me of my old dead nurse. Even though you are only a distant relative of mine, you protect me with your name. As for them, I don't know them; I shall put them out of my mind if I can. What more do they want of me? Fedora says that it is all just gossip, that they will eventually leave me alone. Pray God she is right!

V. D.

June 21

My dove, little mother!

I want to write to you, but don't know how to start. I mean, it's so strange that we are living so close to each other now. I say this because I have never before spent my days in such delight. My, it is as if the Lord had blessed me with a home and family! My child, my pretty little one! What is this you write about the four chemises I sent you? After all, you needed them – I discovered that from Fedora. Pleasing you is an especial happiness for me, little mother; that is my pleasure, and you must leave me to it, little mother; do not come near me and do not gainsay me. Never have I experienced anything like this, little mother. I have launched myself into society now. For one thing, I am living at double intensity, because you are living so close to me and making me so happy; for another, I have been invited to tea today by one of the lodgers, my neighbour, Ratazyayev, the same clerk who holds the literary evenings. There is to be one of those today; we are going to read literature. So you see how I am now, little mother – you see! Well, goodbye. I've really just written this without any particular purpose and solely in order to let you know how well I am. My darling, you told Teresa to tell me that you needed some coloured silk for your embroidery; I shall buy it, little mother, I shall buy you the silk, too. Tomorrow I shall have the pleasure of being able to satisfy you. I even know where to buy it. But for the moment I remain

Your sincere friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 22

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

I must inform you, my dear lady, that a most doleful event has taken place in our lodging-house, one that is truly, truly worthy of compassion! This morning, at about five a.m., Gorshkov's small son died, I do not know what of; possibly it was some form of scarlet fever, but God alone knows! I paid a visit to those Gorshkovs. Oh, little mother, what poverty they live in! And what chaos! And it's no wonder: the entire family lives in one room, which they have divided up with screens for the sake of propriety. They already have a little coffin prepared – a simple one, but quite pretty; they bought it ready-made, the boy was about nine; they say he had promise. But it is pitiful to see them, Varenka! The mother does not cry, but she is so sad, so poor. Perhaps things will be easier for them now that they have got one off their shoulders; but they still have the other two, a boy infant in arms and a little girl who must be six and a bit. There's not really much that's pleasant about watching a child, one's own child, suffer and not being able to do anything about it. The father sits on a broken chair, wearing an old, grease-stained jacket. The tears stream down his face, perhaps not from grief, however, but simply from habit – his eyes are festering. What a queer fellow he is! He keeps blushing when you talk to him, he grows confused and doesn't know what to say. The little girl, the daughter, stood leaning against the coffin – such a sad, thoughtful child, poor thing! I don't like it when children are thoughtful, Varenka, little mother; it's an unpleasant sight! There was some kind of rag-doll lying on the floor beside her – she wasn't playing with it; she had her finger in her mouth, and just stood there, without making the slightest motion. The landlady gave her a sweet; she took it, but did not eat it. That was sad, Varenka, wasn't it?

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 25

My dear Makar Alekseyevich!

I am returning your book to you. It is a thoroughly worthless

little item!– and not fit for decent eyes, either. Where did you manage to dig up such a treasure? Joking apart, I wonder if you really like such books, Makar Alekseyevich? The other day I was promised something to read. If you like, I will share it with you. But now goodbye. Truly, I have no time to write more.

V. D.

June 26

Dear Varenka,

The fact is that, to tell you the truth, little mother, I have not read that unpleasant book. To be sure, I did glance at a bit of it, and saw that it was whimsical stuff, written solely for buffoonery's sake, in order to make people laugh; well, I thought, it must really be funny; perhaps Varenka will like it, too; and so I bought it and sent it to you.

But here, Ratazyayev has promised to lend me some real literary stuff to read, so now you, too, shall have some books, little mother. Ratazyayev knows his onions, he's a connoisseur; he writes himself. O, how he writes! He has a bold pen and oceans of style; in his each and every word, I mean – each one of them – in the most trivial, the most ordinary, vile word of the sort I might sometimes say to Faldoni or Teresa, he has style. I attend the evenings he holds in his room, too. We smoke tobacco, and he reads to us, reads for nearly five hours at a stretch and we listen all the time. It's not literature at all, it's a feast! It's so lovely: like flowers, just like flowers; one can gather a bouquet from every page! He's such a pleasant fellow, so kind and affectionate. Well, what am I compared to him, eh? Nothing. he is a man with a reputation, and what am I? Compared to him, I simply don't exist; yet even for me he has a kind word. I'm doing some copying for him. Now, Varenka, don't go thinking that there's some sort of trick here, that he's only kind to me because I'm doing his copying for him. Don't believe gossip, little mother, don't believe wicked gossip! No, I'm doing it of my own free will, because I want to please him, and if he is kind to me, then that is because he wants to please me. I understand the delicate nature of an action, little mother. he is a good-hearted, a very good-hearted man, and a peerless writer.

Oh, literature is a wonderful thing, Varenka, a very wonderful thing; I discovered that from being with those people the day before yesterday. It is a profound thing! It strengthens people's hearts and instructs them, and – there are various other things about it all in a little book they have. It's marvellously written! Literature is a picture, or rather in a certain sense both a picture and a mirror; it is an expression of emotion, a subtle form of criticism, a didactic lesson and a document. All that I gleaned from being with them. I will tell you quite honestly, little mother, that as I sit among them listening (I even smoke a pipe as they do, what do you think of that?), and they begin to contend and argue with one another about various matters, I simply have to declare my insufficiency – that is all that you or I, little mother, could possibly do in this setting. In this setting I am simply a dunce, an ignoramus; I am ashamed of myself, and I spend the entire evening trying to think of some little contribution to make to the general discussion, yet am unable to do even that! And then, Varenka, I feel sorry for myself, sorry that I am not as they are; that, according to the proverb, I've 'grown in size but not in mind'. For what do I do in my free time now? I sleep, fool that I am. Yet instead of indulging in sleep I don't need, I might be doing something agreeable; like sitting down and writing something. An activity useful to myself and pleasing to others. Goodness, little mother, you should just see how much money they get for it, may the Lord forgive them! Look at Ratazyayev, even – what a lot he earns! What effort does it cost him to write a printer's sheet of prose? Indeed, some days he writes five, and he says he gets three hundred rubles a sheet. He'll produce some little anecdote or other, or an account of some curious event, and for that it'll cost you five hundred, which you'd better fork out, even if it bankrupts you, because if you don't, it's a thousand we'll be putting away in our pocket next time! What do you think of that, Varvara Alekseyevna? I mean, he has a little exercise-book of poems – they're not very long poems – and he's asking seven thousand for them, little mother, seven thousand, just imagine. I mean, that is real estate, it's a capital-investment property! He says they're offering him five thousand, but he won't take it. I've tried to reason with him, take their five thousand, man, I tell him, and spit in their faces – after all, five thousand is money, isn't it? No, he says, let them give me seven, the swindlers. He really is a clever chap!

You know, little mother, since we're on the subject, I think I

shall copy out a little extract from *Italian Passions* for you. That's the title of one of his books. Here, read this passage, Varenka, and be your own judge:

... Vladimir quivered, his passions bubbled up furiously inside him, and his blood seethed...

'Countess,' he cried. 'Countess! Have you any idea how terrible is this passion, how infinite this madness? No, my dreams did not deceive me! I love you, I love you ecstatically, wildly, insanely! Not all your husband's blood will quench the furious, bubbling ecstasy of my soul! Paltry obstacles cannot impede the all-consuming, infernal conflagration that harrows my exhausted breast. O Zinaida, Zinaida! . '

'Vladimir!' the countess whispered, beside herself, leaning against his shoulder...

'Zinaida!' cried the ecstatic Smelsky.

His breast exhaled a sigh. The fire leapt up with a bright flame on the altar of love and harrowed the breasts of the unhappy victims.

'Vladimir!...' the Countess whispered in rapture. Her bosom heaved, her cheeks burned crimson, her eyes were aflame...

The new and terrible union was consummated!

Half an hour later the old Count entered his wife's boudoir.

'Now, my dear, what about having the samovar lit for our dear guest?' he said, giving her a pat on the cheek.

Well, little mother, having read that, what do you think? It's a little on the free-and-easy side, that is certain, but it's good none the less. And what's good is good, you can't say it isn't. And now, if you will permit me, I shall copy out for you another little extract, this time from his novella *Yermak and Suleika*.

The gist of the story, little mother, is that the Cossack Yermak, the fierce and terrible conqueror of Siberia, has fallen in love with Suleika, who is the daughter of the Siberian Tsar Kuchum, and who has been taken captive by him. An event straight from the times of Ivan the Terrible, as you will be aware. Here is the dialogue of Yermak and Suleika:

'Tell me that you love me, Suleika! O tell me, tell me that you do!'

'I love you, Yermak,' Suleika whispered.

'By the earth and all the heavens, I thank you! I am happy! . . You have given me all, all for which my storm-tossed spirit has striven ever since I was a lad. So it is hither you have led me, my guiding star; so this is why you have led me hither,

beyond the Kamenny Poyas.* I will show my Suleika to the whole world, and men, those ferocious monsters, will not dare to accuse me! Oh, if they understood those secret sufferings of her tender soul, if they were able to see an entire poem in one single tear of my Suleika! O, let me brush away that tear with kisses, let me drink it, that divine tear... woman not of this world!

‘Yermak,’ Suleika said, ‘the world is wicked, men are unjust! They will persecute us, they will condemn us, my dear Yermak! What will a poor maiden, who grew up in her father’s yurt amidst the snows of her native Siberia, do in your cold, icy, heartless, vain world? People will not understand me, O my desire, my loved one!’

‘Then the Cossack sabre will be raised, whistling, above them!’ Yermak shouted, his eyes rolling wildly.

Now, Varenka, what do you think of this bit about Yermak when he finds out that his Suleika has had her throat cut? The blind old man Kuchum has stolen into Yermak’s tent in his absence, under cover of darkness, and has cut his own daughter’s throat, out of a desire to deal a mortal blow to Yermak, who has done him out of his sceptre and crown:

‘I take joy in scraping iron against stone!’ Yermak cried in a state of savage frenzy, whetting his damask steel dagger on the shaman’s stone. ‘I must have their blood, their blood! They must be carved, cut up and quartered!!’

And after all that Yermak, unable to go on living without his Suleika, throws himself into the Irtysh, and there the story ends.

Well, and here is a little extract, an example of the humorous-descriptive genre, written specifically in order to make people laugh:

Do you know Ivan Prokofyevich Yellowbelly? You know, the one who bit Prokofy Ivanovich’s leg. Ivan Prokofyevich is a man of abrupt temper, but he has some rare virtues; Prokofy Ivanovich, on the other hand, is extremely fond of black radishes with honey. Now, when Pelageya Antonovna used to be friendly with him... You know Pelageya Antonovna, don’t you? The one who always puts her skirt on inside out?

I mean, that’s killing, Varenka, simply killing! We rolled about with laughter when he read us that. He’s such a one, may the Lord forgive him! But you know, Varenka, although it’s a bit fanciful and rather too frivolous, it’s none the less innocent, without the slightest trace of free-thinking or liberal ideas. I should observe, little mother, that Ratazyayev is a man of impeccable behaviour and is

for that reason a first-rate author – not like some other authors I could mention.

You know, sometimes I have an idea... well, what if I were to write something, what would come of it? Say, for example, that quite suddenly, for no particular reason, a book were to appear with the title *The Poems of Makar Devushkin*? Well, what would you say then, my little angel? How would that seem to you, what would you think? As for myself, I can tell you, little mother, that as soon as my book appeared, I should certainly not dare to show my face on the Nevsky Prospekt. I mean, just think what it would be like when everyone said: 'There's the literary author and poet Devushkin', or 'There is Devushkin'! When that happened, what would I do about my boots, for example? They're nearly always – I mention this in passing, little mother – covered in patches, and I have to tell you also that their soles sometimes hang open in a most unseemly manner. Well, what would happen if everyone found out that the author Devushkin's boots were covered in patches? What if some countess or duchess or other were to learn of it – what would she say, the darling? She probably would not notice it; for, the way I imagine it, countesses don't concern themselves with boots, particularly the boots of government clerks (because there are boots and boots, after all) – but she would be told about it, her friends would give me away. Yes, Ratazyayev would be the first to give me away; he would call on the Countess V.; he says he's invited to every one of her receptions, and that he is almost like one of the family. She's a real darling, he says; literary, he says, a real lady. He's a rascal, that Ratazyayev!

But, anyway, enough of this topic: I'm really just writing all this for fun, my little angel, in order to entertain you. Goodbye, my little dove! If I've scribbled you a lot it's because I'm in such a happy frame of mind today. We all ate dinner together in Ratazyayev's room and they started passing round a Roman wine* such as you've never tasted in your life (they're such frolicsome fellows, little mother!)... But why should I write to you about that? Now don't go getting the wrong idea about me, Varenka. I just tell you all these things for fun. I shall send you the books, I promise I shall... There's a novel by Paul de Kock* going the rounds among us here, but I shall not send you Paul de Kock, little mother... No, no! Paul de Kock isn't good enough for you. They say about him, little

mother, that he provokes all the St Petersburg critics to righteous indignation. I enclose a pound of sweets – I bought them especially for you. Eat them, my darling, and remember me each time you put one in your mouth. Only mind and suck the boiled sweets, and not crunch them, or else you will get toothache. Perhaps you like candied fruit? Do write and tell me. Well, goodbye, then, goodbye. May Christ be with you, my little dove. And I shall remain forever

Your most faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 27

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Fedora says that if I am willing, there are certain people who will be pleased to take an active interest in my position, and will obtain for me a very good post as governess in a certain house. What do you think, my friend – should I accept or not? Of course, I should not then be a burden on you any longer, and the post does seem to be an advantageous one; on the other hand, though, I do not feel good about entering a house of people whom I do not know. They are some kind of country landowners. If they start trying to find out about me, asking me questions, probing me – what shall I say? Then again, I'm so shy and unsociable; I like to go on living for a long time in the same familiar corner. It's somehow better living in the place one's used to: even though one's miserable half the time, it's still better. The place is in the country, what's more; and heaven only knows what sort of duties I will have; perhaps they'll just make me look after the children. And they're such people, too: they've had three governesses in two years. For the love of God, tell me what you think, Makar Alekseyevich, should I accept or not? And why do you never visit me? It's so seldom that you show your face. We hardly ever see each other except in church on Sundays. What an unsociable fellow you are! You're just like I am. I'm nearly a relation of yours, you know. You don't love me, Makar Alekseyevich, and I sometimes get very sad on my own. At times, especially when it's getting dark, I find myself sitting alone as alone can be. Fedora will have gone off somewhere. I sit and think and think – I remember all the old times, the joyful

ones and the sad ones, and they all pass before my eyes, flickering as through a mist. Familiar faces appear (I almost begin to see them for real), and it is Mother whom I see most frequently... And what dreams I have! I have a feeling that my health is not as good as it should be; I am so weak; this morning, for example, when I got out of bed, I started to feel peculiar; on top of that I have such a bad cough! I feel – indeed I know – that I shall die soon. Will anyone give me a funeral? Will anyone walk behind my coffin? Will anyone miss me?... And now, perhaps, I shall have to die in a strange place, in an alien corner of someone else's house... O my God, how sad life is, Makar Alekseyevich! Why do you keep stuffing me with sweets, my friend? I really don't know where you get all the money from. Oh, my friend, look after your money, for God's sake look after it. Fedora is selling the rug I have made; she can get fifty paper rubles for it. That's very good; I had thought it would be less. I shall give Fedora three silver rubles and make myself a new dress – a simple, warm one. I shall make you a waistcoat, I shall make it myself, and shall choose a good material for it.

Fedora has brought me a book – *Tales of Belkin** – which I shall send you if you would like to read it. Only please don't get marks on it, or delay in returning it, as it belongs to somebody else. It's a work by Pushkin. Two years ago Mother and I read the stories in it together, and I felt so sad reading them over again now. If you have any books, please send them to me – only not if they are ones you have got from Ratazyayev. He will probably lend you his own books, if he has had anything published. How can you like his stuff, Makar Alekseyevich? It's such rubbish... Well, goodbye! How I have prattled on! When I'm sad I like to prattle about nothing in particular. It's a kind of medicine: I at once feel better, especially if I am able to talk about everything that is in my heart. Goodbye, goodbye, my friend!

Your

V. D.

June 28

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother,

Enough of this misery! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

Enough, my little angel; how is it that such thoughts come into your head? You are not ill, my darling, you are not in the slightest ill; you are blossoming, positively blossoming; a little pale, perhaps, but blossoming all the same. And what are these dreams and visions of yours? Shame on you, my little dove – enough! You must spit in the face of those dreams, yes, spit in their face. Why do you suppose I sleep well? Why do you suppose that nothing bad happens to me? You ought to look at me, little mother. I take care of myself, sleep well, am in good health, a fine figure of a man, a pleasure to look at. Enough, little darling, enough – shame on you. You must mend your ways. After all, I know how that head of yours works, little mother – as soon as the slightest thing goes wrong you start dreaming and pining. Stop it for my sake, darling. Go into service? Never! No, no and no! What can you be thinking of, whatever has got into you? And in the country, too! Oh no, little mother, I shall not permit it. I shall exert every power at my disposal in order to oppose such a plan. I will sell my old jacket and go about the streets in my shirtsleeves rather than have you want for anything. No, Varenka, no; I know you! This is folly, pure folly! And if there is one thing that's certain, it is that Fedora bears the sole responsibility: she is quite clearly a stupid peasant woman, and it is she who has put you up to all this. Don't you believe a word she says, little mother. You don't know much about her, do you, my darling?... She's a stupid peasant woman, foolish and quarrelsome; she drove her husband into his grave. Or has she been making you lose your temper with her over there? No, no, little mother, not for anything in the world! What would happen to me if you went, what would be left for me? No, Varenka, darling, you must get this idea out of your little head. What do you lack with us? We dote upon you, you are fond of us – sogo on living over there in your quiet way; sew or read, or, if you wish, don't sew – it's all the same, just as long as you go on living with us. Just think for yourself what life would be like here without you!... Look, I shall get some books for you, and then perhaps we'll go and take another walk somewhere together. Only enough, enough, little mother: learn some sense and don't be put off your balance by silly nonsense! I will come and visit you, and in a very short time, too; only in return you must accept my frank and honest opinion: you are wrong, my darling, you are very wrong! I, of course, am an uneducated man and know that I am uneducated, that I was brought up on a shoestring; but that is

not what I am driving at, for it is not I who am at issue here, but Ratazyayev, whose side I shall take, say what you will. he is my friend, and so I take his part. He writes well, he writes very, very, very well. I do not agree with you, and there is no way in which I can agree with you. He writes floridly, in gusts, with figures of speech and all sorts of ideas; it's very fine! I think, Varenka, you must have read it without feeling, or perhaps you weren't in the right mood, you were angry with Fedora about something, or something unpleasant had happened over there. No, you read it again with feeling, preferably when you're happy and content and in a good mood, as when, for example, you have a sweet in your mouth – that's the time you should read it. I don't deny (and who would?) that there are writers who are better, even much better than Ratazyayev, but they have their good points, and so does Ratazyayev; they write well, and so does he. he is a law unto himself, he writes in his own way, and what he writes he writes very well. Well, goodbye; I can write no more; I must make haste, for duty calls. See to it now, little mother, beloved little darling, compose yourself, may the Lord be with you, and I remain

your faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

PS Thank you for the book, my dear; we shall read Pushkin, too; and I promise to come and visit you this evening.

July 1

My dear Makar Alekseyevich,

No, my friend, no, this is no life for me, here among you. I have given the matter some thought and have decided that it would be very wrong of me to refuse such an advantageous post. There I shall at least have my daily bread assured to me; I shall make an effort, I shall earn the good graces of people who are strangers to me, I shall even endeavour to alter my character, if need be. It is, of course, hard and hurtful to live among strangers, to seek their mercy, to hide one's feelings and constrain oneself, but God will help me. I must not remain a stay-at-home all my life. Similar things have happened to me in the past. I remember the days when I was a little girl and used to go to boarding-school. All Sunday I would play

around at home, jumping and skipping; from time to time Mother would scold me, but I didn't care – my heart was so full of happiness, my soul was so radiant. Evening would draw near, and then a mortal sadness would descend on me: at nine o' clock I should have to return to my boarding-school, and there everything was cold, alien and strict, the schoolmistresses were so short-tempered on Mondays – my soul would fairly ache, and I would want to cry. I would go into a corner and weep all on my own, concealing my tears, as people would say I was lazy; yet the reason for my crying had nothing to do with the necessity of study. Well, in any case, I grew accustomed to the school, and then I would cry again when I had to leave it and say goodbye to my companions.

I should be acting wrongly to go on being a burden to both of you. That thought is torture to me. I tell you all this frankly, because I am used to being frank with you. Do you think I don't see the way Fedora gets up at the crack of dawn every morning to do her laundry and works until late at night? And old bones need rest, too. Do you think I don't see the way you ruin yourself over me, spending your every last copeck on me? A man of your means, my friend! You write that you will sell the last of your belongings rather than leave me in hardship. I believe you, my friend, I believe in your good heart – but those are just words. Just now you have some money you did not expect to have, you have been paid a bonus; but what will happen later, what then? You know yourself that I am constantly ill; I cannot work as you do, even though I should be truly glad to – and then there is not always work to be found. What is left for me? To let my heart break from sorrow as I watch the two of you, kind souls that you are? How can I render you even the slightest service? And why am I so indispensable to you, my friend? What good have I ever done you? I am merely devoted to you with all my soul, I love you fiercely, strongly, with all my heart, but – O bitter fate! – am able only to love, and not to do good works, to pay you for your unselfishness. Do not try to hold me back any longer, think about what I have written and tell me your final opinion. I remain, in expectation,

your loving

V. D.

July 1

Folly, folly, Varenka, the purest folly! Turn one is back on you for a moment and heaven alone knows what you get into that little head of yours. One thing is not right, and another thing is not right! But I can see now that it is just folly. I mean, what do you lack with us, little mother – just tell me that! We are fond of you, you are fond of us, we are all happy and content – what more could one wish? And in any case, what will you do among these strangers? I don't believe you even know yet what a stranger is!... No, you would do better to ask me, I will tell you a thing or two about what a stranger is. I know him, little mother, I know him well; I have had occasion to eat his bread. he is mean, Varenka, mean, so mean that your little heart will not suffice you, so cruelly will he torment it with his reprimands, reproaches and dirty looks. Here with us you are warm, you are comfortable – you have found shelter as in a little nest. Why, we shall feel as though we had lost an arm or a leg if you leave. What will we do without you; what will I, old man that I am, do? Do you suppose we do not need you? Do you suppose that you are of no assistance to us? No assistance? How can you think such a thing? No, little mother, consider for yourself: how can you be of no assistance to us? You are of great assistance to me, Varenka. You have such a beneficial influence... See, I am thinking about you now, and it cheers me up... From time to time I write you a letter in which I set forth all my feelings, and receive back a detailed reply from you. I buy you some clothes, I make you a bonnet; sometimes you give me an errand, and I carry it out... No, how can you say you are of no assistance to me? What will I do alone in my old age, what will become of me? Perhaps you have not thought about that, Varenka; but you must think about it – you must say to yourself, what will become of him without me? I have grown accustomed to you, my dear. What will happen otherwise? I shall go down to the Neva, and that will be the end of it. Yes, truly, Varenka, that is what will happen; what else will there remain for me to do with you gone? Oh my darling Varenka! You evidently want the drayman to cart me to the cemetery at Volkovo, with only a mire-sodden old beggar-woman to accompany my coffin, and my grave to be filled in with sand, and my corpse left there alone. That is wrong of you, wrong of you, little mother! Truly, it is wrong of you, well and truly wrong! I am returning your book to you, Varenka, my little friend, and if, my little friend, you ask me my opinion of your book, I shall reply that never in all my life have I

read such a wonderful book. And now I ask myself, little mother, how I could possibly have been content to be such a blockhead all my life, may the Lord forgive me. What have I been doing? From what backwoods have I emerged? I mean, I know nothing, little mother, I know nothing at all! I know absolutely nothing! I will tell you with an open heart, Varenka—I am an uneducated man; I have read little until now, very little, practically nothing: *The Picture of Man*,* a clever book; *The Little Bell-ringer*,* and *The Cranes of Ibcus** – that is all, I have never read any more than that. Now I have read *The Stationmaster** in the book you have sent me here; let me tell you, little mother, it can happen that one spends one's life not realizing that right at one's side there is a book in which one's entire life is set forth as if on the ends of one's fingers. As one begins to read it, one gradually starts to remember and guess and unravel all that was hitherto obscure. And lastly, here is one other reason why I am fond of your book: there are some books which one reads and reads, yet try as one may one can't make head nor tail of them. Take me, for example: I'm stupid, I'm stupid by nature, so I can't read books that are too grand; yet when I read this one, it is as though I had written it myself, just as if, in a manner of speaking, I had taken my own heart, exactly as it is, and turned it inside out so that people could see what was in it, and described it all in detail – that is what it is like! And it is so simple, as God is my witness; but do you know, I really think I should have written it in the same way; why shouldn't I have written it? After all, I have the same feelings, exactly the same ones as are described in the book, and I have sometimes found myself in situations like that of that poor unfortunate fellow Samson Vyrin, for example. How many Samson Vyryns there are going about in our midst, all of them the same poor hapless wretches! And how skilfully it is all described! The tears almost came to my eyes, little mother, when I read the bit where he drinks himself unconscious, the poor sinner, becomes a hopeless drunkard and sleeps all day under his sheepskin coat, staving off his grief with punch and weeping piteously, wiping his eyes with his dirty coat-hem as he remembers his poor lost lamb, his daughter Dunyasha! Oh, that is lifelike! Read it: it is lifelike, it is alive! I have seen it myself – it is what is all around me; Teresa, for example – but has one to look far? Look at our poor clerk – he might very well be Samson Vyrin under another name: *Gorshkov*. It is a matter of common concern, little mother, it might happen to

you or to me. Even a count who lives on the Nevsky Prospekt or the Embankment, even he can experience the same thing, and it only appears to be different because they live in their own way, according to the laws of fashion, but even he can experience the same thing – anything can happen, and it can happen to me, too. That is how it is, little mother, and yet here you are wanting to leave us; don't you see, Varenka, that sin may overtake me? You may ruin both yourself and me, my dear. Oh, my darling, for the love of God put all these capricious thoughts out of your little head and do not cause me unnecessary suffering. Where, my delicate little bird, as yet unfledged, where will you find the means to sustain yourself, to keep yourself from perdition, to defend yourself against villains? Enough, Varenka, you must come to your senses; don't listen to foolish counsel, don't listen to the wicked things they say about us – read your book again, read it carefully: you will derive benefit from that.

I spoke of *The Stationmaster* to Ratazyayev. He told me that was all old hat, and said that the vogue now was for books with illustrations and various kinds of description;* actually, I did not really quite grasp what he was talking about. He ended by saying that Pushkin was good and that he brought fame to Holy Russia, and told me a lot of other things about him. Yes, it's very good, Varenka, very good; read your book once again carefully, follow the advice I have given you and make me happy by your obedience, old man that I am. Then the Lord Himself will reward you, my dear, He will not fail to reward you.

Your sincere friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 6

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Today Fedora brought me fifteen silver rubles. How pleased she was, poor woman, when I let her have three! I write to you in haste. I am making you a waistcoat – it's a gorgeous material, yellow with flowers. I am sending you a book: it contains all sorts of stories; I've read one or two of them; read the one called *The Overcoat*. * You are trying to persuade me to go to the theatre with you; won't that be

rather expensive? Perhaps we could get seats in the gallery. It is a very long time since I went to the theatre, in fact I can't actually remember when it last was. The only thing that makes me hesitate is again the question of whether it won't be too expensive. Fedora merely shakes her head. She says you have started to live far beyond your means; indeed I can see that for myself, in all the money you have spent on me! My friend, be careful you do not get into trouble. Fedora has hinted to me that there are certain rumours – that you have had a quarrel with your landlady about the non-payment of rent; I am very concerned for you. Well, goodbye; I must hurry. I have a little business to attend to, I'm changing the ribbon on my hat.

V. D.

PS You know, if we do go to the theatre I shall wear my new hat and my black mantilla. How will that be?

July 7

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

... So I was telling you about my past. Yes, little mother, at one time in my life even I had my follies. I fell head over heels in love with her, but that in itself would have been nothing remarkable; what was really extraordinary was that I had practically never seen her, and had been to the theatre only once, yet for all that I fell for her hopelessly. At that time I was living through the wall from five excitable young fellows. I associated with them, and indeed could not help doing so, though I always kept within respectable limits. Well, so as not to be thought a slowcoach, I went along with them in everything. They started telling me a lot of things about this young actress! Every evening, as soon as the theatre opened, the whole company of them – they never had half a copeck between them for essentials – the whole company would set off for the theatre, where they would sit in the gallery and clap and clap and call and call for this actress – they were like men possessed! Afterwards I would not be able to get a wink of sleep; all night long they would talk about her, each one of them calling her his Glasha,

each one of them in love with her, each one of them with the same lovebird in his heart. They got me excited, too, defenceless as I was; I was then just a young stripling of a lad. I myself do not know how I managed to end up at the theatre with them, in the fourth tier of the gallery. All I could see was one little corner of the curtain, but I could hear everything. The little actress really did have a pretty voice – it was resonant, honey-sweet, like a nightingale's! We all clapped like mad, shouting and shouting – we nearly got into trouble, and one of us was actually thrown out. I arrived home as though I were drunk! I had only a single ruble left in my pocket, and there were a good ten days to go before I would receive my salary. Yet what do you think I did, little mother? The following morning, before I went to the office, I called in at a French perfumer's and spent all I had left on a bottle of some scent or other and some fragrant soap – I still do not know why I did it. I did not take my dinner at home, either, but kept walking up and down under her window. She lived on the Nevsky Prospekt, in a fourth-floor apartment. I went home, took an hour or two's rest there and went back to the Nevsky again to do some more walking up and down under her window. I did that every day for the next month and a half – paid court to her; I was forever hiring smart cabs and trying to make myself noticed as I drove past her window; I bankrupted myself completely, sank into debt, and then finally got over her: I was sick of it! That is the state to which a young actress can reduce a decent man, little mother! But I was a young stripling of a lad in those days, a young stripling of a lad!...

M. D.

July 8

Varvara Alekseyevna, my dear Madam,

I hasten to return your book, which I received on the 6th of this month, and at the same time to write to you in order to have the matter out with you. It is not good, little mother, not good that you should place me in such an extremity. If I may make so bold, little mother: every station that falls to a man in this world is ordained by the Almighty. This man is ordained to wear a general's epaulettes, while that one is ordained to work in the service as a

titular councillor; this man's to give the orders, and that man is to obey them in fear and trembling, without so much as a murmur. Everything is calculated according to a man's aptitude; one man has an aptitude for one thing, and another has an aptitude for something else, but those aptitudes themselves are arranged by God. I have worked for nearly thirty years now in the service; my work has been above reproach, my behaviour has been sober, and no disorderly conduct has ever been ascribed to me. As a citizen I consider myself, by my own admission, to possess certain defects, but also some virtues. I am respected by the administration, and even His Excellency himself is satisfied with my performance; even though he has not so far shown me any particular signs of favour, I know that he is satisfied. I have lived to see my hair turn grey – I am unaware of having committed any greater sin than that. Of course, who is not guilty of minor sins? Everyone is sinful – even you, little mother! But no major misdemeanours or insolent actions have ever been ascribed to me, such as doing anything against the regulations or causing a breach of public order, nothing like that has ever been laid at my door, there has been none of that: I even got a medal – but what is the good of telling you? You ought in all conscience to have known that, little mother, and so ought he; if you were going to write about me you ought to have known all the facts. No, I did not expect this of you, little mother; no, Varenka! From you in particular I did not expect it.

Here's a fine to-do! After this I can't live quietly in my own little corner any more, even though it is not up to much; now I can't go on living 'without muddying the water', as the proverb has it, not troubling anyone, knowing only myself and the fear of God and not having other people troubling me, forcing their way into my hideaway and spying on me to see what my private life is like, whether I have a good waistcoat or not, or whether I have all that I ought to have in the way of underwear; whether I have boots, and what they are lined with; what I eat, what I drink, what I am copying... So what if I do sometimes walk on tiptoe in order to save my boots where the pavement's bad, little mother? Why write about someone that he sometimes has no money, that he can't even afford tea? As though everyone were under some kind of obligation to drink tea! Do I look into other people's mouths to see what they're eating? Whom have I ever insulted in that way? No, little mother, why should I offend others when they are not troubling me? Look,

here is another example, Varvara Alekseyevna, this is what it boils down to: I work and work, ardently, assiduously – how else? – and the administration respects me (whatever else it may be thinking, it does respect one) – and then along comes someone who, right under one's very nose, without any provocation and for no reason in particular, writes a lampoon about me. Of course, it's true that sometimes I do manage to get some new clothes, and then I'm delighted, I lie awake at night, overjoyed, as when I get a new pair of boots, for instance: I put them on with such voluptuous pleasure – I've found that to be true, it's because it's so good to see my leg covered by a slender, elegant boot – that's correctly described! But I'm none the less truly surprised that Fyodor Fyodorovich should have let a book of this kind pass without sticking up for himself. It's true that he is only a young bigwig, and likes to raise his voice at times; and why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he give us a good telling-off if we need it? Suppose he does it to keep up the general tone of the place – well, that's all right; we need to be kept on our toes, to be given a warning, because – and this is just between the two of us, Varenka – none of us will do anything without being given a warning, each one of us merely seeks to figure on this or that official list so he can say 'I'm there, and I'm there', just so long as he can keep to one side and avoid doing any work. And since there are various different ranks and each rank requires a completely different kind of telling-off, it is natural that the tone of the telling-off varies in rank, too – that is in the order of things! I mean, it's what holds the world together, little mother: that we all set the tone for one another, that each of us tells the other off. Without that precaution the world would fall apart and there would be no order anywhere. I am truly astonished that Fyodor Fyodorovich should have let such an insult pass unnoticed!

And what is the point of writing things like that? What use do they serve? Will a person who reads that story make me an overcoat, do you suppose? Do you suppose that he will buy me a new pair of boots? No, Varenka, that person will simply read the story and then demand a sequel to it. I sometimes hide myself away, I hide myself away in order to conceal the things I have failed in, I'm sometimes afraid to show my face anywhere, because I tremble at the thought of what wicked tongues may be saying about me, because people can concoct a lampoon about one out of anything at all, anything, and then one is entirely public and private

life is held up for inspection in the form of literature, it is all published, read, ridiculed and gossiped about! Why, in this instance it will be impossible for me to go out in the street; in this instance everything has been described in such detail that I will now be instantly recognized by my walk alone. Well, I mean, the author might have at least made up for it a bit towards the end; for example, he could have softened the impact by putting a bit in after the part where they scatter papers over the hero's head, to the effect that for all his faults he was a decent, virtuous citizen who did not deserve to be treated thus by his companions, that he was obedient to his seniors (here he could have inserted an example of some kind), wished no one any harm, believed in God and died (if he really must have his hero die) lamented. It would, however, have been much better not to have left him to die at all, the poor man, but to make his overcoat be found, to have that general find out more about his virtues, invite him into his office, raise him in rank and give him a good hike in salary, so that then, you see, vice would have been punished and virtue would have triumphed, and all those fellow-clerks would have been left empty-handed. That's how I, for one, would have written it; but the way it is, what is so special about it, what is good about it? It is just a trivial example of vile, everyday life. And why did you decide to send me a book like that, my dear? I mean, it's an ill-intentioned book, Varenka; it's simply not true to life, because a clerk of that kind could never exist. After reading such a book one feels like filing a complaint, Varenka, one feels like filing a formal complaint.

Your most obedient servant,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 27

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Your latest actions and letters have frightened, shocked and amazed me; however, the things Fedora has told me have explained everything. But why did you despair in this fashion and fall into the abyss into which you have fallen, Makar Alekseyevich? Your explanations have not satisfied me one little bit. Consider: was I not right when I insisted on accepting the advantageous post I was

offered? What is more, my most recent adventure has frightened me in earnest. You say your love for me has compelled you to keep yourself in hiding from me. I was already able to see that I was greatly indebted to you when you kept assuring me that you were only spending your savings on me, savings you told me you had put by just in case. But now that I have discovered you had no such savings at all, that having found out about my straitened circumstances and having been touched by them you decided to spend your salary, which you had drawn in advance, and had even sold your clothes when I was ill – now, faced with the revelation of all this, I find myself in such an agonizingly difficult position that I still do not know how to construe all this, or what to think of it. Oh, Makar Alekseyevich! You should have rested content with the first of your good deeds towards me, which were prompted by compassion and familial affection, and not have squandered money on unnecessary things. You have betrayed our friendship, Makar Alekseyevich, because you have not been frank with me, and now, when I see that you spent the very last money you had on smart clothes, on sweets, on walks, on the theatre and on books – now I am paying dearly with remorse for my unforgivable frivolity (for I accepted all those things from you without troubling myself about you); and everything by means of which you wanted to give me enjoyment has now turned into bitterness for me, and has left in me nothing but a futile remorse. I have observed your despondency of late, and although I myself had a depressing sense that something was afoot, I never dreamed of this. How can it be? How could you let yourself sink to this depth of despondency, Makar Alekseyevich? What will people think of you, what will people say about you now, all those who know you? You, whom I and everyone else respected for your kindheartedness, your modesty and wisdom – you have fallen prey to a repulsive vice which no one has ever noticed in you before. What do you think I felt when Fedora told me you had been found drunk in the street and had been taken back to your lodgings by the police? I was paralysed with amazement, even though I had been expecting something untoward, as you had been missing for four days. Have you thought, Makar Alekseyevich, of what your superiors will say when they discover the true reason for your absence? You say that everyone is laughing at you; that everyone has found out about our friendship and that your neighbours are making sarcastic remarks about me. Please do not pay any attention

to this, Makar Alekseyevich, and, for the love of God, take a hold of yourself. I am also frightened by this encounter you had with those officers; I have heard vague rumours about it. Please will you explain to me what that is all about? You say in your letter that you were afraid to be open with me, that you were afraid that if you told me about it you would lose my friendship, that you were in despair about what to do in order to help me in my illness, that you sold everything in order to support me and keep me from going into hospital, that you got yourself into debt to the very limit of your credit, and that every day you have unpleasant scenes with your landlady – but I must tell you that, in doing so, you have chosen the wrong course of action. Now, however, I have learned all. You were too ashamed to make me realize that I was the cause of your unhappy position, yet now, by your behaviour, you have succeeded in bringing me twice as much woe. All this has shocked me, Makar Alekseyevich. Oh, my friend! Unhappiness is an infectious disease. Poor and unhappy people ought to steer clear of one another, so as not to catch a greater degree of infection. I have brought you unhappiness such as you never experienced earlier in the modest and isolated existence you have led. All this is tormenting me and making me waste away with grief.

Please write me a frank account of what happened to you and how you could have come to behave like that. If you can, please set my mind at rest. It is not self-regard that compels me to write to you now about my peace of mind, but my friendship and love for you, which nothing will ever efface from my heart. Goodbye. I await your reply with impatience. You do not properly know me, Makar Alekseyevich.

Your truly loving,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

July 28

My precious Varvara Alekseyevna,

Well, since all that is now over and things are gradually returning to how they were before, I will tell you this, little mother: you are worried about what people will think of me, but I hasten to assure you, Varvara Alekseyevna, that my self-esteem is what

matters to me before all else. As a consequence of which, and with reference to my misfortunes and all these disorderly events, I beg to inform you that none of my superiors know anything about them, nor are likely to do so, and will therefore all continue to treat me with respect, as before. I am afraid of only one thing: loose tongues. The landlady in our house over here has been shouting her head off, but now that with the help of your ten rubles I have paid off part of my debt to her she merely grumbles, and that is all. As for the others, they turn a blind eye; as long as one doesn't try to borrow money from them, they don't care. And to conclude my explanations I shall tell you, little mother, that I value your respect for me more highly than anything else in the world and am consoled by it now in my temporary state of confusion. Thank God that the first impact and the worst of the trouble is now over, and that you have construed it in such a way as not to consider me a false friend and a selfish brute for keeping you here and deceiving you, not having the strength to part with you, and loving you as my little angel. I have set zealously to work now and have begun to discharge my duties well. Yevstafy Ivanovich did not say a word when I walked past him yesterday. I will not conceal from you, little mother, that my debts and the shabby condition of my wardrobe are causing me considerable pain, but that is nothing to worry about, either, and I beseech you not to despair in that regard, little mother. If you will send me another fifty copecks, Varenka, then those fifty copecks too, will pierce my heart. So this is what it has come to now, this is what it has come to! It is not I, old fool that I am, who am helping you, but you, my poor little orphan, who are helping me! Fedora did well to get the money. For the moment I have no hope of getting any, little mother, but as soon as there is hope of my doing so I will write and tell you all about it. But it is loose tongues, loose tongues that worry me most of all. Goodbye, my little angel. I kiss your hand and implore you to get well again. I do not write in more detail because I am in a hurry to get to work, since I wish by dint of zeal and effort to make amends for my dereliction of duty; I shall put off a further account of all that happened to me and of my adventure with the officers until the evening.

Your respectful and truly loving

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

Oh, Varenka, Varenka! Now it is you who are the guilty one. Your letter completely flabbergasted me and put me off my balance, and it is only now, when in my spare time I have managed to search the innermost corners of my heart, that I realize I was right, absolutely right. I speak not of my drunken binge (bother it, little mother, bother it!), but of the fact that I love you and that it was not at all unreasonable of me to fall in love with you, not unreasonable of me at all. You don't know anything about it, little mother; yet if only you knew why it happened, why I could do no other but to fall in love with you, you would not say those things. That is only your reason talking; I am certain that your heart says something else entirely.

My little mother, I myself do not know and cannot properly remember what took place between those officers and me. I must tell you, my little angel, that in the time leading up to that event I had been in the most terrible state of distress. You must bear in mind that for the whole of the previous month I had been, so to say, hanging by the merest thread. My situation was a thoroughly wretched one. I had been keeping myself to myself, seeing neither you nor the other people in the house; but my landlady kept raising a terrible hullabaloo. In other circumstances that might not have mattered to me. Let the miserable woman shout as much as she wanted to – but in the first place there was the shame of it, and in the second there was the fact that, God knows how, she had learned of our friendship and kept shouting such things about it to the whole house that I was frozen with horror and stopped up my ears. The trouble was, however, that the others did not stop up theirs, but, on the contrary, strained them in order to hear. Even now, little mother, I don't know where to hide myself...

And then, my little angel, all this devil's brew of every kind of affliction completely overwhelmed me. I suddenly started to hear strange things from Fedora: that an unworthy suitor had appeared on your doorstep and had insulted you by making an unworthy proposal; that he had indeed insulted you, deeply insulted you, I judged by my own reactions, little mother, because I *myself* felt deeply insulted. At that point, my little angel, I lost my wits entirely: I went into a panic and completely lost control. Varenka,

my friend, I ran out in an impossible rage; I wanted to go and confront him, the blackguard; I didn't know what I wanted to do – so great was my determination that no one should insult you, my little angel! Yes, I was in a sorry state. It was raining, there was sleet, it was a horribly depressing day... I was almost on the point of turning back... Then, little mother, came my fall. I met Yemelya,* that's Yemelyan Ilyich – he's a clerk, or rather he was, he's not one any more, because he's been dismissed from our department. I don't even know what he does now, he toils away at something or another there; well, I went with him. Then – but Varenka, I cannot really think that you will derive much enjoyment from hearing about your friend's misfortunes, about the calamities that have befallen him and the ordeals he has endured. On the evening of the third day, Yemelya egged me on, and I went to see that officer who had insulted you. I found out his address from our yardkeeper. If you want to know the truth, little mother, I have long been aware of that fine fellow; I used to keep an eye on him when he was lodging in our house. I can see now that I committed an improper act, as I was not my right self when I was announced to him. Quite honestly, Varenka, I can't remember any of it; all I remember is that there were an awful lot of officers in his place, or perhaps I was seeing double – God knows. I can't remember what I said, either. All I remember is that in my righteous indignation I said a great many things. Well, then they turfed me out and threw me down the stairs – actually, they didn't quite do that, but just shoved me out. You already know how I got home, Varenka; that's all there is to tell. Of course, I brought myself discredit and my pride took a knock, but after all, no one else apart from yourself knows anything about it; and if that is so, then it's just the same as if the whole thing had never happened. Perhaps it is – what do you think, Varenka? The only thing I know for certain is that in our house last year Aksenty Osipovich made a similar attack on the personal honour of Pyotr Petrovich, only in secret, he did it in secret. He made him go into the nightwatchman's room with him, I saw it all through a crack in the door; and there he did what was necessary to settle the matter, but in a decent manner, as no one saw what took place except myself; well, and it didn't bother me, or rather, that is, I didn't tell anyone about it. Well, after that Pyotr Petrovich and Aksenty Osipovich stopped getting at each other. Pyotr Petrovich is a proud man, you know, so he didn't tell anyone,

and even now they still bow to each other and shake hands with each other. I will not contest, Varenka, to you I would not dare to contest that I have sunk very low and, what is even more terrible, have lost in terms of my own self-regard; but this was doubtless written in my stars from birth, this must be my fate – and there is no escaping fate, as well you know. Well, that is a full account of my misfortunes and calamities, Varenka, that is everything that happened at that time, even if you do not care to read it. I am somewhat unwell, my little mother, and have lost all playfulness of feeling. And so now, testifying to my devotion, love and respect for you, I remain, my dear madam, Varvara Alekseyevna,

Your most obedient servant,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 29

Makar Alekseyevich, My Dear Sir!

I have read both your letters, and how they made me sigh! Listen, my friend: you are either hiding something from me and only telling me a part of all your unpleasant experiences, or... to be honest, Makar Alekseyevich, your letters still show the signs of a certain confusion... for goodness' sake come and see me, come and see me today; and listen, come and have dinner with us, you know you are welcome. I do not know how you are, and whether you have patched things up with your landlady. You write nothing about all that, as if you were hiding something on purpose. So until we meet, my friend; you must promise to come and see us today; and you would do best to come and eat with us every day. Fedora is a very good cook. Goodbye.

Your

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

August 1

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Mother!

You are glad, little mother, that God has sent you an opportunity of doing one good deed in exchange for another, and of

showing your gratitude. I have faith in that, Varenka, I have faith in the goodness of your angel's heart, and I say this not as a rebuke – but please do not reproach me, as you have done, for squandering my money in my old age. Yes, if you really must insist that I have sinned, then what is there to be done about it? I have sinned; only it costs me much to hear such things from you, my little friend. You must not be angry with me for saying this; in my breast there is nothing but pain and hurt, little mother. Poor folk are capricious – that is the way nature makes them. This is not the first time I have felt it. The poor man is a severe critic; he looks at God's world from a different angle, he furtively sizes up each person he meets, looks about him with a troubled gaze, and listens carefully to every word he overhears – are people talking about him? Are they saying he is not much to look at, wondering about what he is feeling, what he is like from this point of view and that point of view? And Varenka, everyone knows that a poor man is worth less than an old rag, and cannot hope for respect from anyone, whatever they may write, those scribblers, whatever they may write! The poor man will remain the same as he has always been. And why will he remain the same? Because, according to their lights, the poor man must be turned inside out; he must have no privacy, no dignity of any kind! Yemelya told me the other day that some people somewhere organized a whip-round for him, and that a sort of official check was made of every copeck that was paid to him. They thought they were giving him their money out of charity – but they weren't: they were paying for having a poor man exhibited to them. Even charity is conducted in a peculiar way nowadays, little mother... but perhaps it has always been like that – who knows! Either they don't know how to do it, or they're past masters at it – one or the other. Perhaps you didn't know that; well, there you are! In any other field of knowledge you can count us out, but here we're experts! And how does it come to be that a poor man knows all this and thinks all these things? Why, because he has experience! Because, for example, he knows that there is at his side a gentleman who is going to a restaurant, saying to himself: 'What is that ragged clerk going to eat today? I'm going to have *sauté papillotte*, while he is probably going to have kasha with no butter. But what business is it of his, what I'm going to eat? There is a type of man, Varenka, who thinks only about things like that. And they go about, the shameless lampoonists, looking to see whether you put the whole of your foot

down on the pavement or just the tips of your toes; look, they say, such-and-such a clerk from such-and-such a department, a titular councillor, is going around with his bare toes sticking out of his boots, and the elbows of his jacket worn through – and then they go home and write about it all and then have this rubbish printed... But what business is it of his that my elbows are worn through? Indeed, if you will forgive me a coarse expression, Varenka, I will even go so far as to say that on this account the poor man has a modesty that is equivalent to your own maidenly reticence. I mean, you wouldn't – please forgive my vulgarity – unveil yourself in front of everyone, would you? In precisely the same way the poor man doesn't like people to look into his hideaway to see what his private life is like. And so there was no need to insult me, Varenka, taking sides with my enemies who assail the honour and personal dignity of an honest man.

And as I sat in the office today I felt such an ungainly fool, such a bedraggled old idiot that I nearly burned up with shame. I was so ashamed of myself, Varenka! After all, it's not surprising one feels ashamed when one's bare elbows are peeping through one's sleeves and the buttons on one's jacket are hanging by threads. And as luck would have it, my desk was in the most terrible mess! In spite of myself, my spirits sank. What can I say?... Stepan Karlovich himself began discussing my work with me today; he talked and talked, and then added, almost casually: 'Oh, Makar Alekseyevich, old chap!' – and didn't finish the rest of what he'd intended to say. But I guessed what it was, and I blushed so violently that even my bald patch turned red. It was really an insignificant event, yet it nevertheless made me feel anxious and prompted me to gloomy thoughts. What if the others overheard? O God forbid that they should have overheard anything! I must confess that I suspect, strongly suspect a certain little fellow. I mean, it is nothing to them, those villains! They will inform on me! They will give away all the details of a man's private life for a brass copeck; they hold nothing sacred.

I now know whose doing this is. It is Ratazyayev's doing. Yes, he must know someone in our department who overheard the conversation and who repeated it all to him with bits added on; or perhaps he told the story to the people in his own department and it found its way to ours. Whatever the truth may be, everyone in our lodging-house knows the whole story right down to the last detail,

and they point to your window; I know that they do this. When I went to have dinner with you yesterday, they all put their heads out of their windows; the landlady said that the devil had taken up with the infant, and then she called you an indecent name. But all that was nothing compared to Ratazyayev's villainous intention of putting you and myself into literature and describing us in an elegant satire; he told me of this himself, and some of the more kindly disposed of our lodgers have also informed me of it. I no longer know what to think about anything, and I do not know what to do. There is no use in trying to conceal our sin, we have incurred God's anger, my little angel! You said you would send me a book, little mother, to keep me from being bored. Fie upon it, the book, little mother! What is a book? It is just a fable with faces! Novels are rubbish, too, written as rubbish, merely for idle people to read: believe me, little mother, trust my experience of many years. And if they come telling you about some Shakespeare or other, saying 'Look, there is Shakespeare – he is literature' – then be aware that Shakespeare is rubbish, too, it's all the purest rubbish, and all made simply for the purpose of lampoonery!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 2

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Don't worry about a thing; with God's help it will all be settled. Fedora has managed to get a whole pile of work for the two of us to do, and we have made a start on it in a thoroughly cheerful frame of mind; perhaps we shall set everything to rights. Fedora has a suspicion that Anna Fyodorovna may know a thing or two about my recent unpleasant experience; but now it's all the same to me. For some reason I feel unusually cheerful today. You want to borrow money – God forbid! You will have terrible trouble later on when you have to pay it back. You would do better to live on closer terms with us – come and see us more often and don't pay so much attention to your landlady. As for your other enemies and ill-wishers, I am sure you are tormenting yourself with needless doubts, Makar Alekseyevich! Take care; after all, I did tell you last

time that your way of putting things is extremely irregular. Well, goodbye, until we meet. I expect to see you without fail.

Your

V. D.

August 3

varvara Alekseyevna, my little angel!

I hasten to inform you, little light of my life, that I have begun to entertain hopes of a certain nature. But, daughter mine – you write, my little angel, that I am not to take any loans? My little dove, I cannot manage without them; after all, I am unwell, and what if things were suddenly to go wrong for you, as for all I know they might? I mean, you are not exactly strong; so that is why I wrote that I must absolutely borrow some money. Well, then, I shall continue.

Varvara Alekseyevna, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that in the office I sit next to Yemelyan Ivanovich. he is not the Yemelyan of whom you already know. This one is a titular councillor, like myself, and he and I are practically the oldest and longest-established employees in the whole of our department. he is a good soul, an altruistic soul; he doesn't say much, and always gives everyone a surly look. But he is businesslike, and he writes a good English round hand; if you want to know the truth, he writes as well as I do – he's a worthy fellow! He and I have never been on intimate terms, we're merely in the custom of saying hullo and goodbye to each other; and if I occasionally need to use the penknife I ask him for it – 'Pass me the penknife, please, Yemelyan Ivanovich,' I'll say. In short, our relationship has been limited to the demands of our working together in the same office. Well, today he said to me: 'Makar Alekseyevich, why have you grown so pensive of late?' I could see that the man wished me no harm, and I told him what was on my mind. 'It is like this and it is like that, Yemelyan Ivanovich,' I said; in other words I didn't tell him everything – God forbid, I shall never tell it all, as I have not the courage – but merely told him a bit about how I was feeling the pinch and that kind of thing. 'You know what you ought to do, old chap?' Yemelyan Ivanovich said. 'You ought to borrow; why don't you

borrow from Pyotr Petrovich, he lends money at interest; I've borrowed from him myself in the past, he charges a reasonable rate – it won't overburden you.' Well, Varenka, my heart leapt. I thought and thought, it is just possible that the Lord will touch the soul of that beneficent man Pyotr Petrovich, and he will grant me a loan. I was already working out in my head how then I would be able to pay the landlady, help you, and sort out my affairs all round; otherwise I would be in such a shameful position: just sitting at my desk makes me feel terrible, never mind the jeering laughter of those scoffers of ours, the devil take them. And then, sometimes His Excellency passes my desk; well, God forbid that he should cast a glance at me and notice that I'm not properly dressed. The things that count for most with him are cleanliness and tidiness. He might not say anything, but I would die of shame – that is how it would be. So, in consequence, I summoned up my courage and, concealing my sense of shame in my pocket full of holes, I went off to see Pyotr Petrovich, full of hope and yet more dead than alive with apprehension – both at the same time. But why, Varenka, it all ended in nonsense! He was busy with something, and was talking to Fedosei Ivanovich. I approached him from the side and tugged his sleeve: 'Pyotr Petrovich,' I said, 'Pyotr Petrovich!' He looked round, and I continued, telling him this and that, how I needed thirty rubles, and so on. At first he did not understand me, and then, when I had explained it all to him, he merely laughed and said nothing. I repeated my request. Then he said to me: 'Have you any security?' And he buried his nose in the document he was busy with, went on writing and did not give me a further glance. I was dumbfounded. 'No, Pyotr Petrovich,' I said, 'I've no deposit.' I explained to him that as soon as I received my salary I would consider it my first duty to pay the money back. At that point someone called him; I waited for him, he returned and then began to sharpen his pen, apparently oblivious of me. I continued to press my case: 'Pyotr Petrovich,' I said, 'can't something be managed somehow?' He said nothing and seemed not to hear; I stood there and stood there. 'Well,' I thought, 'I'll try just one last time,' and I tugged him by the sleeve. He said something I could not make out, finished sharpening his pen, and began to write; I gave up, and walked away. You see, little mother, they may be worthy men, but they're proud, very proud – but what is that to me? Why should we trouble ourselves with them, Varenka? That is why I have written you all this.

Yemelyan Ivanovich also laughed and shook his head, but he gave me hope, the kind fellow – Yemelyan Ivanovich is a worthy man. He promised to introduce me to a certain man; this man, Varenka, lives on the Vyborg Side, and also lends money at interest; he is some kind of fourteenth-class civil servant.* Yemelyan Ivanovich says this man will be sure to lend me the money; I shall go and see him tomorrow, my little angel – eh? What do you think? I mean, I'll be in trouble if I don't get a loan. My landlady is almost on the point of evicting me, and she won't give me any more meals. And my boots are in a shocking state, little mother, and I've no buttons on my jacket... I've nothing much of anything else, either! Well, what if someone from the administration notices an improper state of affairs like that? I'll be in trouble, Varenka, terrible trouble!

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 4

Dear Makar Alekseyevich,

Please, for the love of God, try to borrow some money as soon as you possibly can; I would do anything rather than ask you for help in your present circumstances, but if you only knew the position in which I find myself! It is out of the question for us to remain in this apartment. A most horribly unpleasant thing has happened to me, and you have no idea how upset and agitated I am! Imagine, my friend: this morning we received a visit from a stranger, advanced in years, an old man, practically, wearing medal-ribbons. I was totally bewildered, and could not think what he wanted with us. Fedora had gone out shopping at the time. This man started to ask me questions: how was I, what was I doing, and, without waiting for a reply, he informed me that he was the uncle of that officer, and that he was very angry with his nephew for his bad behaviour and for having spread our name all over the house; he said that his nephew was a puerile, superficial fellow, and that he himself wished to offer me his protection; he advised me not to listen to young men, and added that he sympathized with me as a father, that he had fatherly feelings for me and wanted to help me in any way he could. I turned quite red, not knowing what to think, but was in no hurry to accept his offer. He took hold of my hand by force, patted me on the cheek, said that I was very pretty and that

he was particularly pleased to note I had dimples (God knows what things he said!), and finally tried to kiss me, saying that he was just a harmless old man (what a vile character he was!). At that point Fedora came in. Put off his mark by this slightly, he once again said that he felt respect for me because of my modesty and my correct behaviour, and that he very much hoped I would not be put off by him. Then he took Fedora aside and tried to give her a certain sum of money on some strange pretext. Fedora naturally refused to take it. At last he got ready to leave, repeated his assurances, and said he would come and see me again and bring me earrings (I think he was very embarrassed); he advised me to move to another apartment and told me about a very nice one he knew of which he could get me for nothing; he said he had taken a real liking to me as I was an honest, sensible girl, counselled me to be on my guard against dissipated young men, ended by informing me that he knew Anna Fyodorovna and that Anna Fyodorovna had instructed him to tell me that she was going to pay me a visit. At that point it all became clear to me. I don't know what happened to me; it was the first time in my life that I had ever experienced such a situation; I was beside myself with rage; I put him utterly to shame. Fedora helped me, and together we more or less kicked him out of the apartment. We decided it must all have been Anna Fyodorovna is doing; otherwise how could he have known about us?

So now I turn to you, Makar Alekseyevich, and beseech you for help. For the love of God, do not leave me in a situation like this! Please try to borrow at least something, we don't have enough money to change apartments, and it's impossible for us to remain here any longer: that is what Fedora says, too. We need at least twenty-five rubles; I'll pay you the money back; I shall earn it. Fedora will get me some more work in a few days' time, so don't be put off if they demand a high rate of interest – agree to anything. I'll pay it all back, only for the love of God don't withhold your help. It distresses me greatly to have to trouble you now, when you are in such dire straits yourself, but you are the only hope I have! Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich, think of me, and may God grant you success!

V. D.

August 4

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove!

All these unexpected blows are dumbfounding me! Such terrible disasters are breaking my spirit! What is more, this devil is brood of lickspittles and worthless old greybeards is trying to bring you to your sickbed, my little angel – not only that, these very same lickspittles are trying to wear me out. And they will succeed, I swear it, they will succeed! You know, I would sooner die than fail to bring you the help you need! If I fail to help you, Varenka, that will be the end of me, pure and simple; yet if I do help you, you will fly away from me, like a bird from the nest which these owls, these birds of prey, have been trying to peck to death. That is what is tormenting me, little mother. Oh, Varenka, you are cruel, too! Why are you like that? You are subjected to torture and insult, my little bird, you suffer, and what is more you grieve because you have to trouble me, and then you promise to work off the debt – which really means that in your frail state of health you will kill yourself in order to get me the money on time. I mean, Varenka, just think what you are saying! Why should you have to sew, why should you have to work, tormenting your poor little head, ruining your pretty little eyes and destroying your health? Oh, Varenka, Varenka! Look, my little dove, I am fit for nothing – I know I am fit for nothing, but I shall do things in such a way as to make myself fit for something! I shall overcome all difficulties. I'll get work on the side, I'll copy things for literary men, I'll go to them, I'll go to them myself and force them to give me work; because they're looking for good copyists, I know that they are, and I won't let you wear yourself out; I won't allow you to carry out such a ruinous intention. I shall surely borrow the money, my little angel, I'd rather die than not borrow it. And you write, my dove, that I shouldn't be frightened off by a high rate of interest –well, I won't, little mother, I won't be frightened off, nothing can frighten me now. I'll ask for forty paper rubles, little mother; that is not too much, is it, Varenka – what do you think? Do you think I can get forty rubles' worth of credit first time off? In other words, what I mean is, do you think I'm capable of inspiring trust and confidence at first sight? Do you think it is possible that they'll judge me favourably at the first sight of my physiognomy? You remember me, my little angel, do you think I'm capable of inspiring confidence? What is your own personal opinion? You know I feel so terribly afraid – it's unhealthy, really

unhealthy! Out of the forty rubles I shall set aside twenty for you, Varenka; the landlady will get two silver rubles, and the rest will be earmarked for my own personal expenditure. Now you see, I ought to give the landlady a bit more, it is even necessary, but you figure it out for yourself, little mother, take into account all my needs and you will see that it is impossible for me to give her more, so consequently there is no point in even talking about it, and we might as well forget about it. I shall spend one silver ruble on a pair of boots; I don't really think I can go to the office tomorrow wearing my old ones. A new tie would also be a good idea, as I've had my old one for more than a year now; but since you have promised to make me, out of your old apron, not only a tie but also a shirtfront, I shan't give any more thought to a new tie. So there, I have boots and a tie. Now we come to the subject of buttons, my little friend! After all, my little one, I think you will agree that one cannot do without buttons; and almost half of mine have fallen off! I tremble when I think that His Excellency may notice this disorderly state of affairs and say – oh, what would he say? At any rate, little mother, I wouldn't hear what he said; for I'd die, I'd die, I'd the on the spot, I should simply the of shame, from the very thought! Oh, little mother! Well, after all those necessities I'll have three rubles left; that will go on living expenses and half a pound of tobacco; because, my little angel, I can't live without tobacco, and it's nine days now since I had a pipeful. I would, to tell you the truth, buy it and say nothing about it to you, but I'd feel guilty. There you are in misery, you're doing without the most essential things, and here I am enjoying all sorts of gratification; so that is why I'm telling you all this, so as not to suffer the torments of my conscience. I will frankly confess to you, Varenka, that I am now in a thoroughly disastrous situation – indeed, nothing remotely similar to this has ever happened to me before. The landlady treats me with contempt, and I get no respect from anyone; I'm terribly short of money, I have debts; and as for my life at the office, where even previously my fellow clerks weren't exactly in the habit of putting out the red carpet for me – well, little mother, now it doesn't bear speaking about. I hide my feelings, I scrupulously hide my feelings from them all, and I hide myself, and when I come into the office I do it stealthily, and I keep away from everyone else. I mean, you're the only person with whom I can summon up the strength of mind to confess it... And what if he won't lend me the money? No,

Varenka, it is better not to think about that and not have one is spirit broken in advance by such ideas. Another reason I am writing to you is to warn you not to think about that and not to torment yourself with evil imaginings. Oh, my God, what will become of you then? It is true, however, that you won't be able to move out of that apartment, and I'll be with you – but no, I wouldn't come back. I'd just disappear somewhere, go missing. Here I am covering sheets with writing to you, and I ought to be getting shaved; it looks better, and looks are important. Well, may God be with us! I shall say a prayer, and then be off.

M. DEVUSHKIN

August 5

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich!

Please don't give in to despair! There is enough trouble already as it is. I am sending you thirty copecks in silver; more than that I cannot manage. Buy yourself the things you need most, so that at least you can survive until tomorrow. We ourselves have practically nothing left, and I do not know what will happen tomorrow. It is so sad, Makar Alekseyevich! But don't *you* be sad; if you haven't succeeded, there is nothing to be done about it. Fedora says that it is not a complete disaster, that we can stay on in this apartment for a while yet, that even if we moved we wouldn't gain that much by it, and that if they really put their minds to it they can find us wherever we are. It is just that I don't feel very good about staying on here now. If I didn't feel so sad I would write to you about a few things.

What a strange character you are, Makar Alekseyevich! You take everything too much to heart; because of that, you will always be a most unhappy man. I always read your letters very closely, and I see that in each one of them you show a worry and concern about me such as you have never shown about yourself. People will, of course, say that you have a good heart, but to that I will reply that it is too good. Let me give you a piece of friendly advice, Makar Alekseyevich. I am grateful to you, very grateful for all that you have done for me, I am deeply appreciative of it; so imagine what I feel like when I see that even now, after all the calamities which have befallen you, and of which I have been the involuntary cause,

you are still living exclusively through me: my joys, my griefs, my emotions! If you take someone else's experiences so much to heart and have such a strong degree of sympathy with them all, you will end up a most unhappy man. Today when you came into my room after you had returned from the office I felt afraid. You were so pale, so frightened, so despairing: you looked awful – and all because you were afraid to tell me that you had failed, afraid of upsetting me or alarming me. And when you saw that I was almost on the point of laughing, your spirits lifted at once. Makar Alekseyevich! Don't be so miserable, don't give in to despair, be more sensible – I beg you, I implore you. Look at it this way: everything will be all right, everything will work out for the best; otherwise it will be so hard for you to go on living, forever downcast and tormented by other people's suffering. Goodbye, my friend; I beg you not to worry so much about me.

V. D.

August 5

Varenka, my little dove!

Well, that is fine, my little angel, that's fine! You have decided that it is not a complete disaster, my failure to get the money. Well, that's fine, my mind is at rest, I am happy on your account. I am even glad that you are not going to abandon me, old man that I am, and that you will remain in your present apartment. In fact, to tell you the truth, my heart overflowed with joy when I read all the nice things you said about me in your letter and saw how you rendered my feelings the praise that was due. I say this not out of pride, but because I can see how you must love me, if you are so worried about my feelings. Well, that's fine; what is there to be said about feelings, in any case? Feelings do as they will; but then, little mother, you also tell me not to be faint-hearted. Yes, my little angel, indeed, I am the first to admit that it is no good being faint-hearted; yet for all that, see for yourself, little mother, what manner of boots I must wear to the office tomorrow! There's the rub, little mother; but I mean, a thought like that can crush a man, crush him totally. But the main thing, my darling, is that it is not myself I am grieving for, not myself for whose sake I am suffering; it is all the

same to me, I'll go around without an overcoat in the biting frost and manage without boots, I'll suffer it and put up with it, I don't mind; I'm an ordinary man, a little man – but what will people say? My enemies, all these evil tongues, what will they say if I go around with no overcoat on? After all, one wears an overcoat for the sake of other people, and the same is true of boots. I need boots, little mother, my darling, in order to maintain my honour and my good name; if my boots have holes in them, I can say goodbye to both the one and the other – believe me, little mother, and trust in my many years of experience; listen to me, an old man who knows the world and its inhabitants, listen to me, and not to scribblers and scrawlers.

I have not yet given you a full account, little mother, of all that happened today, and of what I have been through. I suffered more mental agony in one morning than many men endure in the course of a year. This is what happened: in the first place, I set off at the crack of dawn, in order to catch him and then be in time for the office. What rain, what sleet there was this morning! I wrapped myself up in my overcoat, my dear, I trudged on and on, thinking to myself all the while: 'Lord, forgive me my transgressions and grant the fulfilment of my desires!' As I was passing St X's. Church, I made the sign of the cross over myself, repented of all my sins and rediance that it was unworthy of me to try to do business with the Lord God. I was absorbed in myself, and had no wish to look at anything; thus I trudged on, not really noticing where I was going. The streets were deserted, and the few people I did run into looked worried and preoccupied, and no wonder: who would go out for a walk so early and in weather like that? I came upon a gang of dirty workmen; they shoved me, the peasants! I was attacked by a sense of fear, a sinking feeling came over me, to tell you the truth, I didn't want to think about the money – let chance decide! Just as I was about to cross Voskresensky Bridge the sole of one of my boots fell off, and I don't really know how I managed to walk any further. At that point I saw Yermolayev, one of the clerks in our office, coming in my direction. He came to a halt, stiffened up and followed me with his gaze, as though he were begging for money to buy vodka; 'Eh, old chap,' I thought, 'vodka? Where'll you get vodka round here?' I was horribly tired. I stopped, rested for a bit, and then plodded onwards. I searched about for something on which to fasten my thoughts, to provide myself with a diversion, to cheer myself up: but no – not one of my thoughts could find anything to

adhere to, and moreover I got so muddled that I was ashamed of myself. At last in the distance I saw a yellow wooden house with an attic turret like a belvedere – ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘that’s it, that’s how Yemelyan Ivanovich described it – Markov is house.’ (This Markov is the man who lends money, little mother.) By that time I was in a bit of a daze; I mean, I knew it was Markov is house, but even so I asked the policeman who was on duty there: ‘Whose house is this, officer?’ The policeman was a rude fellow, spoke as though it was an effort to do so, as though he were angry at someone, through his teeth: ‘Whose house is it?’ he said. ‘It’s Markov is house, of course.’ These policemen are all such insensitive fellows – though what do I care about policemen? But from then on everything seemed all wrong and unpleasant, just one bad thing after another; it is as though one picked up in everything only those impressions that are concordant with one’s state of mind, and it is always like that. I walked up and down outside the house three times, and the longer I walked, the worse I felt. ‘No,’ I thought, ‘he won’t lend me the money, never in a million years will he lend it to me. I’m a stranger to him, my request is a ticklish one, and I don’t look right. Well,’ I thought, ‘let fate decide; as long as I don’t feel like kicking myself afterwards; he won’t eat me just for trying.’ And I quietly opened the gate. Then another misfortune befell me: I was set upon by a stupid, wretched watchdog; it was practically jumping out of its skin, barking as loudly as it could! Vile, trivial incidents like that that always infuriate a man, little mother, they take away his self-confidence and undermine all the determination he has summoned up beforehand; so I entered the house more dead than alive, and walked straight into yet another misfortune – unable to see in the darkness that surrounded the front entrance, I tripped and fell over some peasant woman who was straining milk from a pail into some jugs, and all the milk got spilt. The stupid woman began to shriek and chatter, saying ‘Where do you think you’re going, my fellow, what is it you want?’ Then she started wailing something about the evil one. I include this in my account, little mother, because this kind of thing always happens to me in this kind of situation; it seems to be written in my stars; I unfailingly get bogged down in something irrelevant. Hearing the noise, an old witch of a Finnish landlady stuck her head out of the door, and I went straight up to her: ‘Does Markov live here?’ I said. ‘No,’ she said; she stood there giving me a good look over. ‘What do you want with him?’ I told

her this and that, saying that Yemelyan Ivanovich had – well, and all the rest of it – I said I'd come on business. The old woman called her daughter – a grown girl who was barefoot – 'Go and get your father; he is upstairs with the lodgers,' she said to her. To me she said, 'Come in.' I went inside. The room wasn't too bad, there were pictures on the walls, all portraits of generals; there was a sofa, a round table, a spray of mignonette, some little pots of balsam – I had a good think, and wondered whether I oughtn't to just clear off and make no bones about it. And I mean, oh, little mother, I really wanted to take flight! 'I'd do better to come back tomorrow,' I thought; 'the weather will be better then, why don't I wait for a bit? Today the milk is been spilt, and those generals look a bit stropy to me...' I was already at the door when he came in – a grey-haired little fellow with furtive little eyes, dressed in a grease-stained dressing-gown tied at the waist with a piece of rope. He inquired the reason for my visit, and I said that Yemelyan Ivanovich had told me one thing and another, and that it was a question of forty rubles, but I couldn't get to the end of it. I could see from his eyes that my cause was a lost one. 'We can't do business,' he said, 'I've no money; do you have any security?' I started to explain that I hadn't any security, but that Yemelyan Ivanovich – in short, I explained what I wanted. When he had heard everything, he said: 'Never mind what Yemelyan Ivanovich told you – the fact is, I've no money.' 'Well,' I thought, 'that is it, then; I knew this was how it was going to be, I could sense it.' Oh, Varenka, I wished the earth would swallow me up; I felt so cold, my legs were stiff with it, and the goosepimples ran up and down my spine. I looked at him, and he looked at me, and I could see he was more or less saying: 'All right, brother, now be off with you – there is nothing for you here.' I mean, if the same thing had happened in different circumstances, I'd have felt utterly ashamed of myself. 'What do you need the money for, anyway?' he asked. (He actually asked that, little mother!) I opened my mouth, if only to avoid standing there to no purpose like that, but he cut in before I could speak. 'No,' he said. 'I've no money; if I had, I'd have lent you some with pleasure.' Then I began to press my case, told him it was only a little money I needed, said I would pay it back on time, that he could name any percentage of interest he liked, and swore to God I would pay back the full amount. At that moment I mentioned you, little mother, I mentioned all your misfortunes and privations, I mentioned the fifty

copecks you had sent me – ‘No,’ he said. ‘What good is interest? Now if you had some security! But in any case, I’ve no money, I swear to God and truly I haven’t; I’d have lent you some with pleasure.’ He took the Lord is name in vain, too, the scoundrel!

Well, my dear, I don’t really remember how I got out of that place, how I managed to cross Vyborg Street and get on to Voskresensky Bridge. I was horribly tired, was chilled to the bone and it was ten o’clock before I managed to report for work. I wanted to brush some of the mud off me, but Snegiryov the caretaker wouldn’t let me: ‘You’d ruin the brush, master, and it’s government property,’ he said. That is the way they all behave now, little mother. To these people I’m no better than a rag for them to wipe their boots on. Do you know what it is that breaks my spirit, Varenka? It is not the money, it is all these everyday worries, all these whispers, smiles, jokes. Apparently it is possible that His Excellency may concern himself with my particulars – Oh, little mother, my golden days have passed forever! Today I reread all your letters; it made me so sad, little mother! Goodbye, my darling, may the Lord preserve you!

M. DEVUSHKIN

PS My intention, Varenka, was to describe my troubles from a humorous point of view, but I evidently don’t have the knack of it, humour, I mean. I shall come and see you, little mother, without fail, I shall come tomorrow.

August 11

Varvara Alekseyevna! Little mother, my dove! I am lost, we are both lost, both of us together, irretrievably lost. My reputation, my pride – allgone. It is the end of me, and the end of you, little mother, it is the irreversible end of both of us together! And it is I, I who have brought you to this! They are persecuting me, little mother, they treat me with contempt, hold me up to ridicule, and the landlady has simply begun to abuse me; she has been shouting and shouting at me today, she railed and railed at me, reduced me to the lowest of the low. And this evening in Ratazyayev is room one of them began reading out the draft of a letter I’d written you, it had somehow fallen out of my pocket. Mother of mine, what a feast of derision they had over it! They named us, they named us

out loud and hooted with laughter, the traitors! I went into the room where they were and accused Ratazyayev of treachery; I told him he was a traitor. Ratazyayev replied that I myself was a traitor, that I spent my time with 'various conquests': 'You've been hiding it from us,' he said. 'You're a Lovelace. * And now they all call me 'Lovelace', and won't address me by any other name! Do you hear, my little angel, do you hear? Now they know everything, they have all the facts, they know about you, my darling, they know about all your personal matters, they know it all! Why, even Faldoni was there, and he is in cahoots with them; I sent him out to the sausage-shop to buy something; he simply refused to go; 'I'm busy,' he said. 'But you're obliged to,' I said. 'Oh no, I'm not,' he said; 'you haven't paid my mistress her rent, so I'm not obliged to you.' I wasn't going to have an uneducated peasant insulting me, and I told him he was a fool; to which he replied: 'And you're another one.' I think he must have been drunk, to say such an offensive thing to me – and indeed I said to him: 'You're drunk, you peasant!' To which he replied: 'Well, if I am it is not at your expense, you haven't got enough money to get drunk yourself; you even go begging for a few copecks from some woman or other.' And then he added: 'And you're a gentleman, too!' You see what it has come to, little mother? I'm ashamed to go on living, Varenka! Like some kind of outcast; worse than a vagrant without a passport. It is a terrible disaster! -it is the end of me, quite simply the end! The irreversible end!

M.D.

August 13

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich,

It's just one thing after another, I myself no longer know what to do! What is to become of you now? As for myself, things do not look too rosy for me; today I burned my left hand with the iron; I let it fall by accident, and it bruised me and burned me, both at the same time. I cannot possibly do any work, and Fedora has been ill for three days now. I am in an agonizing state of agitation. I send you thirty copecks in silver; it is practically the last money we have left; oh, as God is my witness, how I should have liked to be able to help you now in your privations. It hurts me to the point of tears,

not to be able to do so! Goodbye, my friend! You would bring me great consolation if you would come and visit us today.

V. D.

August 14

Makar Alekseyevich! What has got into you? You must have lost your fear of God! You are simply driving me out of my mind. Are you not ashamed? You will be your own undoing. Just think of your reputation! You are an honest, decent, self-respecting man – well, what will you do when everyone hears of you? You will simply die of shame! Have you no fear of God? Fedora told me that she refuses to help you any more, and I won't give you any more money, either. What have you brought me to, Makar Alekseyevich? I expect you probably think I don't care that you behave so badly; you don't know what I have to endure because of you! I can't even go up and down our stairs: everyone stares at me and points to me with their fingers, and they say such terrible things; yes, they say quite openly that I've *taken up with a drunkard*. Think what I feel when I hear that! When you are brought back here all the lodgers point at you with contempt: 'Look,' they say, 'they've brought that clerk back again.' And I can't endure the shame I feel for you. I swear to you that I will move away from here. I'll go and work somewhere as a housemaid or a laundrywoman, but I won't stop here. I wrote asking you to come and visit me, but you never did. My tears and entreaties evidently mean nothing to you, Makar Alekseyevich! And where did you get the money from, in any case? In the Lord's name, take care! I mean, you will come to ruin, you will come to ruin for nothing! And the shame, the ignominy! The landlady refused to let you in last night, you spent the night in the outhouse: I know everything. If you knew how wretched I felt when I learned of it. Please come and see me, visiting us will cheer you up: we'll read together, we'll remember old times. Fedora will tell us about the religious pilgrimages she was on. Please, for my sake, my dear friend, don't bring about your own undoing and my own. After all, I live for you alone, and it is for your sake that I am remaining with you. And this is how you behave! Be a decent man, steadfast in misfortune; remember that poverty is not a sin. And indeed, what reason is there for despair? It is all just temporary! With God is

good will, everything will come right again – only now you must exercise self-control. I send you twenty copecks, buy some tobacco with it or whatever takes your fancy, only don't, for the love of God, spend it on drink. Come and see us, come and see us without fail. Perhaps you'll feel ashamed, the way you did last time, but don't: it is a false shame. Just bring some genuine repentance with you. Trust in God. He will arrange everything for the best.

V. D.

August 19

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

I am put to shame, Varvara Alekseyevna, my treasure, I am utterly put to shame. But in the end, little mother, what is so special about all this? Why not cheer one's heart a little? When the soles of my boots fall off I don't give them any thought, because a boot-sole is rubbish, and will always be nothing more than an ordinary, vile, dirty boot-sole. And boots themselves are rubbish, too! If the Greek sages could go around without boots, why should a fellow like me waste time fussing over such undignified objects? So, in that case, why insult me, why treat me with contempt? Oh, little mother, little mother, these are fine things you write to me! And you can tell Fedora that she is a quarrelsome, flighty, disorderly woman, and what is more a stupid one, unspeakably stupid! As for my grey hair, you are wrong about that, my dear, because I am not nearly as old as you think I am. Yemelya sends you his greetings. You say in your letter that you have been grieving and weeping; well, I will tell you that I have been grieving and weeping, too. In conclusion I wish you happiness and good health; as for myself, I am happy and in good health, too, and remain, my little angel,

Your friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 21

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam and kind friend,

I feel that it is all my fault, I feel that I have sinned in your

regard, and in my opinion there is no advantage to be derived from that at all, little mother, from the fact that I feel all that, whatever you may say. I felt it all even before my misdemeanour, but then my spirits sank with the consciousness of my guilt. My little mother, I am not a man of ill will, I am not hard-hearted; but in order to torture your little heart, my dove, one would have to be no more nor less than a bloodthirsty tiger, and, well, I possess the heart of a lamb and have, as you know, no disposition towards greed; consequently, my little angel, I am not entirely to blame for my misdemeanour, since neither my feelings nor my thoughts were to blame; and indeed, I don't know what was to blame. It is a puzzling business, little mother! You sent me thirty copecks in silver, and then twenty in copper; my heart began to ache as I surveyed your orphan is mite. You had burned your little hand, you would soon be going hungry yourself, yet you told me to buy tobacco. Well, what was I to do in such a position? Was I, like some bandit, to start plundering you, a little orphan? It was at that point that my spirits sank, little mother; that is to say, at first, being overwhelmed by the feeling that I was no good for anything and was little better than the sole of one of my own boots, I thought it improper for me to believe myself of any consequence, and started to view myself as something improper and, to a certain degree, indecent. Well, once I had lost all respect for myself, once I had abandoned myself to the denial of all my good qualities and of my own sense of self-worth, then I was done for, my downfall was assured! It is all predetermined by fate, and I am not to blame for it. I started off by going out for a breath of fresh air. Then it was just one thing after another: nature was so lachrymose, the weather was cold, it was raining, and, well, Yemelya happened to come along. He had already pawned everything he owned, Varenka, all his things had found another home, and when I met him he hadn't had a drop of poppy-dew in his mouth for two whole days, so he was at the stage of trying to pawn what can't be pawned, because it is not the kind of thing that is acceptable as security. Well, you see, Varenka, I gave in more out of compassion for suffering humanity than because I felt that way inclined. That is how that sin came to be committed, little mother! He and I wept together! We talked about you. he is a good, a thoroughly good man, and one of great feeling. I feel all this myself, little mother; that is the reason why all these things happen, because I feel it all so intensely. I know how much I

owe you, my little dove! When I got to know you, I began, for a start, to know myself better, and I came to love you; before you came along, my little angel, I was lonely and as good as asleep, I wasn't really living in the world at all. They, my ill-wishers, said that even my appearance was indecent; they treated me with repugnance, and, well, I began to share it. They said I was stupid, and I really believed them. When you came my way you lit up the whole of my dark life, so that my heart and my soul were illumined, and I attained tranquillity of mind, founded in the knowledge that I was no worse than other men; with the one reservation that I had no outstanding abilities of any kind, that I had no gloss, no style – but for all that, I was a human being, with the thoughts and feelings of a human being. Well, but now, feeling that I was being hounded by fate and that, humiliated by her, I had abandoned myself to the denial of my own sense of self-worth, I let my spirits sink, dejected by the calamities that had befallen me. And as you now know everything, little mother, I beg you in tears not to show any further inquisitiveness about that matter, as my heart is breaking, and I am in the most bitter distress.

I bear testimony, little mother, to my continued esteem for you, and remain your faithful,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 3

I did not finish my last letter to you, Makar Alekseyevich, because I have been feeling too heavy of heart to be able to write. Sometimes I have moments when I am glad to be alone – to be sad alone, depressed alone, without sharing my mood – and such moments are beginning to visit me more and more often. In my memories there is something I find inexplicable, something which absorbs me so instinctively and so powerfully that for several hours at a stretch I am oblivious to all that surrounds me and forget everything, everything that is in the present. In the life I am presently leading there is nothing, whether pleasant, grievous or sad, which does not remind me of something similar in my past, above all in my childhood, my golden childhood! But after such moments are past I always have a heavy heart. I seem to lose my strength, my reverie exhausts me; and my health is getting worse and worse, even

without this additional strain. But today the fresh, bright, radiant morning, of which in autumn here there are but few, brought me back to life, and I greeted it with joy. So, autumn is with us already! How I used to love autumn in the country! I was just a child in those days, but even then I experienced a great many feelings. I preferred the autumn evenings to the mornings. I can remember that just a few yards from our house, at the foot of the hill, there was a lake. That lake – I seem to see it now – that lake was so wide and light, as pure as crystal! Sometimes, if the wind had died, the lake would be calm; there was not a rustle from the trees that grew along the shore, the water was as still as a mirror. So fresh, so cold! The dew would be settling on the grass, the lights would start to glimmer in the izbas* along the shore, a herd of cattle would be being driven home – it was then that I would slip stealthily out of the house in order to look at my lake, and I would lose myself in its contemplation. Right by the edge of the water the fishermen would have a faggot burning, and its light would flow far, far away, out over the water. The sky was socold – darkblue, illumined at the horizon by red, fiery stripes, which became paler and paler; the moon would come out; the air would be so resonant that if a frightened bird were to flutter its wings, a reed to begin murmuring in the light breeze, or a fish to splash in the water – one could hear it all. A white vapour, delicate and transparent, would rise over the dark-blue water. The distant expanses grew dark; everything seemed to drown in the mist, and yet all that was close to was sharply defined, as if cut by achisel – theboat, the shore, the islands; a disused barrel, which had been left on the shore, now bobbing slightly in the water, the branch of a willow tangling its yellowed leaves with the reeds – then a late seagull would go flapping up, now diving into the cold water, now flapping up again and disappearing into the mist. I would become lost in contemplation and listening – I would feel wonderfully happy! Yet I was still only a young thing, a child... I loved the autumn so much – the late autumn, when the harvest is being brought in and all the work of the fields is coming to a close, when the sit-round gatherings are beginning in the peasant izbas, when everyone is waiting for winter. At that time of year everything grows gloomier, the yellow leaves strew the padhs along the edges of the bare woods, which turn dark blue, almost black – especially at evening, when a damp mist descends and the trees loom out of it like giants, like terrible,

monstrous apparitions. I might delay in returning while out on a walk, fall behind the others, walk alone, quickening mystep – it was sinister! I myself would be trembling like one of those leaves; there, I would think, at any moment some fearsome being will look out of that tree-hollow; and all the while the wind would be rushing through the woods, whistling, moaning and howling so dolefully, tearing the clusters of leaves from the withered twigs, whirling them in the air; and, in a long, wide, noisy flock, the birds hurtling after them with wild, penetrating cries, turning the sky black as they covered it across. I would grow afraid, and then I would seem to hear someone's voice whispering: 'Run, run, child, don't delay; terrible things will happen here in a moment, run, child!' A sense of horror would grip my heart, and I would run and run until my breath gave out. I would reach home, panting; there it was noisy and cheerful; all of us children would be given work to do: shelling peas or seeding poppies. The damp firewood crackled in the stove; Mother would cheerfully supervise our cheerful work; our old nurse Ulyana would tell us about the old days, or relate terrifying stories about corpses and enchanters. We children would huddle together, girl companion against girl companion, and we would all have a smile on our lips. Then suddenly we would all fall silent... listen! A noise! Like someone knocking! But it would be nothing; just old Frolovna is spinning-wheel droning away; how we would laugh! And then at night we would be unable to sleep because we were so afraid; we would have such terrible dreams. Waking up in the middle of the night, I would not dare to stir, and shivered under the bedspread until daybreak. In the morning I would rise as fresh as a daisy. I would look out of the window: the fields would be covered in frost; the delicate hoarfrost of autumn hung from the bare branches; there would be a thin covering of ice on the lake; a white vapour would be rising over its surface; the birds would be singing merrily. The sun shone on everything with its brilliant rays, which would break the thin ice like glass. Everything was light, brilliant, happy! The fire would be crackling in the stove once more; we would all seat ourselves close to the samovar, and our black dog Polkan, chilled to the marrow from being out all night, would look in at the window with a friendly wag of his tail. A muzhik would ride by on his best horse, on his way into the woods to gather firewood. Everyone was so pleased, so happy!... Oh, what a golden time my childhood was!... Now I have begun to cry like a child,

carried away in my memories. I remember it all so vividly, so vividly, all my past stands so clearly before me, and the present seems so lustreless, so gloomy!... How will this end, how will it all end? You know, I have a sort of conviction, a kind of certainty that I shall die this autumn. I am very, very ill. I often think about dying, but even so I don't want to die like this, and be buried here. It may be that I shall have to take to my bed again, as I did back in the spring, though I have still not recovered. Even now I feel very heavy of heart. Fedora has gone off somewhere for the whole day, and I am here alone. For some time now, however, I have been afraid to be left on my own; I keep imagining that there is someone else in the room with me, that someone is talking to me; especially when I start to muse about something and suddenly snap out of my musing, in such a way that I grow afraid. That is why I have written you such a long letter; when I write, that feeling passes. Goodbye: I shall finish now, because I have no more paper nor time. Of the money I got from pawning my dresses and my hat I have only a ruble in silver left. You have given your landlady two rubles in silver; that is fine, now she will keep quiet for a bit.

Try to get your clothes mended somehow. Goodbye; I am so tired; I don't know why I am growing so weak; the slightest exertion wears me out. If work comes my way, how shall I be able to do it? That is the thought that really breaks my spirit.

V. D.

September 5

Varenka, my little dove!

I have had a great many experiences today, my little angel. For one thing I have had a headache all day. In order to try to obtain some relief, I took a walk along the Fontanka. It was a damp, dark evening. It is already dark by six o'clock now – there's a fine thing for you! There was no rain, but the fog was making up for it. Long swathes of dark cloud were passing across the sky. A huge multitude of people was making its way along the embankment, and to fit the general mood they all had the most fearful, depressing faces; drunken muzhiks, snubnosed Finnish peasant women, booted and bareheaded, workmen, cabbies, people like yours truly, out on

some errand; boys, some locksmith is apprentice in a striped overall, haggard and sickly looking, his face covered in sooty oil, a lock in his hand; a retired soldier, as tall as a building – that was the sort of public it was. It was evidently the time of day when no other kind of public shows its face. The Fontanka is a navigable canal, after all. There is such a vast number of barges that one wonders how they can all get in. Peasant women sit on the bridges with soggy honeycakes and rotten apples – they are all such sodden, dirty women. It is not much fun walking along the Fontanka! Wet granite under one is feet, on either side tall, black, sooty houses; fog under one is feet, and fog above one is head. That is the sort of sad, dark evening it was today.

When I turned into Gorokhovaya Street it was already quite dark, and the gas was being lit. I haven't been in Gorokhovaya Street for quite a little while – it is not a privilege that is been accorded to me. What a noisy street it is! Such shops, such rich department stores; everything fairly burns and glitters – the materials, the flowers under glass, the various hats with ribbons. You might think that all this had simply been displayed here for show – but that is not the case—I mean, there are people who buy all these things and make a present of them to their wives. A wealthy street! A lot of German bakers live in Gorokhovaya Street; they must also be very well-to-do. All those carriages constantly driving by; how does the paving stand it? There are sumptuous equipages, with windows as glossy as mirrors, and velvet and silk inside; they have aristocratic footmen, wearing epaulettes and swords. I looked into all the carriages, in every one of them there were ladies who were all dressed up, perhaps they were princesses or countesses. It must have been the hour when they all hurry to balls and assemblies. I would be curious to see what princesses and aristocratic ladies in general look like close to; very nice, I should think; I've never seen; except as I saw today, when I looked into those carriages. Then I remembered you. Oh, my little dove, my darling! When I remember you now, my heart aches within me! Why are you so unfortunate, Varenka? My little angel! In what way are you inferior to them? I think you are kind, lovely, versed in learning; so why should such a wicked fate fall to your lot? Why does it always happen that a good person lives in desolation, while happiness comes to another unasked? I know, I know, little mother, that it is not right to think that way, that that is free-thinking; but

in all candour, in all truth, why does the raven fate croak fortune to one child still in its mother's womb, while another comes into God's world by way of the foundling hospital? I mean, it's often the case that fortune is granted to Ivan the Fool. It's as if someone were to say: 'You, Ivan, may put your hand in the familial moneybags, eat, drink and be merry; but you, whatever-your-name-is, can eat your heart out – that is all you're fit for, my good fellow!' It's sinful, little mother, it's sinful to think like that, but in this case sin has a way of stealing into one's heart without one being able to do much about it. I wish you could also ride in one of those carriages, my darling, my treasure. Generals would seek the favour of a well-disposed glance from you – not yours truly; you would wear, not that old unbleached gown, but silk and gold. You would not be thin and unhealthy looking as you are at present, but would look like a sugarplum fairy – fresh, plump, and rosy-cheeked. And then the only thing that would make me happy would be to catch a glimpse of you from the street at your brightly lit windows, even just a glimpse of your shadow; the mere thought that you were so happy and gay up there would make me happy too, my pretty little bird. Yet how are things now? It is not enough that wicked people have ruined you, that some worthless trash, some loose debauchee has insulted you. Just because his coat fits him like a glove, because he can look at you through his gold pince-nez, the shameless villain, he can do as he pleases, and you must listen to his indecent talk with indulgence! Enough Enough, I say! And why is it like this? Oh, because you're an orphan, because you're defenceless, because you have no powerful friend who could give you some decent support. But I mean, what sort of man is this, what sort of people are these who think nothing of insulting an orphan? They are trash, not people, simply trash; they are just names in a book, they don't really exist, of that I am certain. That is what they are like, these people! But in my opinion, my darling, that hurdy-gurdy man I ran into today in Gorokhovaya Street inspires more respect than they do. He may spend the whole day hanging about waiting for some miserable, grubby half-copeck on which he can subsist, yet for all that he is his own master, and supports himself. He doesn't want to beg for alms; so he toils in order to give people entertainment, like a clockwork automaton– 'Look' he says, 'I'm doing what I can to give you entertainment.' he is destitute, of course, there's no denying that; but he is destitute in a noble sort of way; he is tired,

he is chilled to the bone, but still he toils, in his own, peculiar way, maybe, but he toils. And there are many of these honest people, little mother, who although they earn but little in proportion to the usefulness of their labour, bow to no one and beg for alms from no one. I, too, am like that hurdy-gurdy man – that is to say, not really like him at all, but in my own way, in my own noble, aristocratic way, I am just like him – I toil as I am able, I do what I can, in other words. More than that I cannot offer; what can't be cured must be endured.

I have mentioned this hurdy-gurdy man, little mother, because today I have had occasion to experience an especially keen sense of my own poverty. I had stopped to look at the hurdy-gurdy man. There were all these thoughts swarming about in my head – so, in order to divert myself, I stopped. Among the spectators, apart from myself, there were some cabbies, some prostitute or other, and a little girl who was all covered in grime. The hurdy-gurdy man had stationed himself in front of the windows of someone's house. I noticed a street-urchin, a little boy, who must have been about ten; he would have been pretty, but he looked so weak and ill; he was dressed in a shirt and not much else, and stood there practically barefoot, listening to the music open-mouthed – like the child he was! He stared in wonderment as the German dolls danced; his own arms and legs were stiff with cold, he was shivering, and nibbling the end of one of his sleeves. I observed that he was holding a small sheet of paper in his hand. A gentleman walked by and threw the hurdy-gurdy man some coin of little value; it landed right inside the hurdy-gurdy man's box, which had a small surround on which was depicted a Frenchman dancing with some ladies. At the clink of the coin, the little boy gave a start and timidly looked round, evidently supposing that I had thrown the money. He came running up to me, his little hands trembling and his little voice quavering, held the sheet of paper out to me and said: 'Here is a letter!' I unfolded it. It was the usual thing: 'Dear Benefactor, a mother with children is dying, she has three and they are hungry, so if you will please help us, and not forget my little fledglings, when I die I will not forget you in the next world, my benefactor.' Well, that was clear enough, there was nothing unusual about it, but what did I have to give them? So I didn't give them anything. But how sorry I felt for him! The boy looked so wretched, he was blue with cold and probably hungry as well, and he was in

earnest, oh yes, he was in earnest; I know a bit about these things. What is bad is that these scurvy mothers don't look after their children and go sending them out with letters half-naked in cold weather like this. Perhaps she is a stupid peasant woman with no strength of character; and perhaps she has no one to go out and work for her, so she just sits cross-legged and is genuinely ill. But she could still apply in the quarters where such cases are dealt with. On the other hand, perhaps she is just a fraud, purposely sending a hungry, feeble child out to dupe people, and thereby making him ill. And what does the poor boy learn from handing out these letters? His heart merely grows hardened; he goes around, runs up to people, begging. The people are going about their business, and they have no time. Their hearts are stony; their words are cruel: 'Be off with you! Go away! You won't make a monkey out of me!' That is what he hears from everyone is lips. His child is heart grows hardened, and the poor frightened boy shivers for nothing in the cold, like a little bird that has fallen out of a broken nest. His arms and legs are frozen; he gasps for breath. The next time you see him, he is coughing; it is not long before illness, like some unclean reptile, creeps into his breast, and when you look again, death is already standing over him in some stinking corner somewhere, and there is no way out, no help at hand – there you have his entire life! That is what life can be like! Oh, Varenka, it is so agonizing to hear those words 'For the love of Christ', and to walk on, and give the boy nothing, to say to him: 'God will provide.' Some 'For the love of Christ' are not so bad. (There are various kinds of them, little mother.) Others are long-drawn-out, habitual, studied – a beggar is stock-in-trade; it is not so hard to refrain from giving to one of those – he is an inveterate beggar, one of long standing, a beggar by trade; he's used to it, you think, he'll get over it, he knows how to get over it. But another will be unpractised, coarse, terrible – as today when, just as I was about to take the letter from the boy, a man standing by the fence, who was selecting the people he asked for money, said to me: 'Give me a half-a-copeck, *barin*, for the love of Christ!' in such a rude, abrupt voice that I shuddered with a sense of terrible emotion, but did not give him a half-copeck: I didn't have one. And then again, there's the fact that rich people don't like the poor to complain of their lot out loud – they say they are causing trouble, being importunate! Yes, poverty is always importunate – perhaps those groans of hunger keep the rich awake!

To tell you the truth, my dear, I began describing all this to you partly in order to unburden my heart, but more particularly in order to provide you with an example of the good style of my literary compositions. Because I think you will probably agree, little mother, that my style has improved of late. But now I am visited by such sickness of heart that I have begun to feel my thoughts in the depths of my soul, and although I am aware, little mother, that this feeling will not get me anywhere, I none the less believe that I am in a certain sense doing myself justice. And really, my darling, I often take the wind out of my own sails for no reason at all, I consider myself not worth a pinch of salt, class myself among the lowest of the low. To use a comparison: perhaps this happens because, like that poor boy who begged me for alms, I myself am bullied and overworked. Now I shall express this to you by way of example and allegory, little mother; listen to this: sometimes, my darling, early in the morning when I am hurrying to work, I have occasion to take a glance at the city as it is waking up and getting out of bed, emitting its vapours, seething and rumbling – sometimes this spectacle makes one feel so small that it is though someone had given one a slap on one is inquisitive nose, and one trudges onwards with a shrug of one is shoulders, as quiet as a mouse. Now, just take a look at what is going on in those big, black, sooty buildings, investigate it thoroughly, and you yourself will be able to tell whether I had good reason to class myself as the lowest of the low and to be cast into an undignified state of confusion. Observe, Varenka, that I express myself allegorically, not in a direct sense. Well, let's take a look: what is there in those buildings? There, in some smoky corner, in some dank bolthole which must out of necessity serve as a lodging, some artisan is waking from slumber; all night he has been dreaming, let us say, of the boots which the day before he inadvertently cut a hole in, as though anyone ought to spend a whole night dreaming about such rubbish! But he is an artisan, a cobbler: it is excusable for him to think about his specialty all the time. His children are clamouring and his wife is hungry; and it is not just cobblers who sometimes get out of bed in the morning feeling like that, little mother. That would be of no consequence, and would not be worth writing about; but you see, little mother, there is something else to be taken into account: right there, in the same building, on the storey above or below, in his gilded chambers, a very rich personage has been dreaming in the

night about those very same boots – in a different aspect, of course, from a different point of view, but still about those boots; for in the sense I am here implying, little mother, we are all, my darling, to a certain extent cobblers. Even that would be of no consequence, except that it is bad that there should be no one at that very rich personage is side, no one who might whisper in his ear the words: ‘Come now, that is enough of thinking only about this subject, of thinking only about yourself, living only for yourself; you’re not a cobbler, your children are healthy and your wife isn’t begging for food; take a look around you – can’t you find a more noble subject for your concern than your boots?’ That is what I wanted to say to you in this allegorical manner, Varenka. It is, my dear, possibly too radical a thought, but it is a thought that is sometimes there, that sometimes visits one and then emerges from one is heart in ardent words. And so there was no reason to consider oneself not worth a pinch of salt, and let oneself be frightened by all the noise and thunder! I will conclude, little mother, by supposing you may wonder if I am spouting slander, or have been overtaken by an attack of spleen, or have copied all this out of some book or other. No, little mother, you may dispose of any such illusions: I loathe slander, I haven’t had an attack of spleen, and I didn’t copy this out of any book – so there!

I arrived home in a melancholy state of mind, sat down at the table, warmed my teapot and made myself a couple of glasses of tea. Suddenly I saw Gorshkov, our poor lodger, coming towards me. Earlier, on the morning of that day, I had noticed him poking about near the other residents and looking as though he wanted to come up to me. I should tell you in passing, little mother, that he is far worse off than I am. Far, far worse off! He has a wife and children! If I were in his shoes, I don’t know what I should do. Well, anyway, our Gorshkov came in and bowed, a tear festering in his eyelashes as always, shuffling his feet and unable to get a word out. I made him sit down on my other chair – it’s broken, I know, but it must suffice. I offered him some tea. He kept trying to give me reasons why he shouldn’t have any, went on for ages about that, but he finally accepted a glass. He would have drunk it without sugar, and began once more to resist when I tried to persuade him to take some, spent a long time arguing and refusing, and finally put the very smallest lump in his glass, assuring me that the tea I had given him was unusually sweet. Oh, what humiliations people are driven

to by poverty! 'Well, what is it, old fellow?' I said to him. 'Oh, it's like this, Makar Alekseyevich, my benefactor,' he said. 'Show the Lord's mercy and help my unhappy family; I've a wife and children, and they have nothing to eat; think how hard that is for me to bear as a father!' I started to reply, but he broke me off: 'I'm scared of all the people here, Makar Alekseyevich – that is to say, I'm not so much scared of them, as, well, you know, ashamed in front of them; they're all such a proud and conceited lot. Normally I wouldn't have bothered you, my friend and benefactor: I know that you yourself have been in difficulties, I know that you're not in a position to give me much, but at least lend me something. Also,' he said, 'I've made so bold as to ask you because I know you have a kind heart, I know that you yourself have been in need, that you are even now experiencing misfortunes – and that your heart will therefore feel compassion.' He concluded by asking me to forgive him for his 'insolence and impropriety'. I replied that I would like nothing better than to lend him some money, but that I had none, absolutely nothing. 'Makar Alekseyevich, old chap,' he said to me, 'it's not much I'm asking for, it's just that what with one thing and another (here he blushed all over) my wife and children are hungry – if you could even just spare me a copper or two.' Well, when I heard that I felt a tug at my heart. 'Why,' I thought, 'they're even worse off than I am!' But all I had left was twenty copecks, and I needed it all: I was going to spend it the following day on my most basic requirements. 'No, my dear fellow, I can't; what with one thing and another,' I said. 'Please, Makar Alekseyevich, old chap, give me something, however little, even if it's just ten copecks,' he replied. Well, little mother, I took my twenty copecks out of my money-box and gave it to him: it was my good deed for the day! Oh, poverty! I engaged him in conversation. 'How is it, old chap, that you're in such a plight, yet you're renting a room that costs five silver rubles a month?' He explained to me that he had taken the room six months earlier and had paid three months' rent in advance; then, however, circumstances had conspired against him in such a way that he did not know which way to turn, poor fellow. He had hoped that his case would be settled by this time. But it's an unsavoury sort of case he is got himself into. You see, Varenka, he is up before the courts for something. he is litigating with some merchant or other who swindled the state authorities over the matter of a contract; the deception was found out and the merchant

was arrested, but he managed to implicate Gorshkov in his criminal deeds, and Gorshkov was in some way involved in them. But in actual fact Gorshkov was only guilty of negligence, imprudence and inexcusable dereliction of the state's interests. The case has been going on for several years now: various obstacles keep cropping up in Gorshkov's way, making it impossible for him to clear his name. 'As regards the dishonesty of which I'm accused,' Gorshkov tells me, 'I'm not guilty, not guilty at all, and I'm not guilty of swindling and robbery either.' This case has besmirched his reputation somewhat; he has been fired from the service, and although he has not been found guilty of any crime on the statute-books, until he has been completely acquitted he can't get back from the merchant a certain whopping sum of money which he is owed and which is now the subject of a court dispute. I believe him, but the court won't accept his word for it; it's one of those cases in which there are so many ins and outs that you'd never unravel them all in a hundred years. No sooner have a few of them been ironed out than the merchant produces some more. I feel really sorry for Gorshkov, my dear, and I know what he is going through. The man has no job; no one will take him on because of his unreliable reputation; they've used up all the money they had saved, on food; the case is full of complications, yet meanwhile they needed to live; and meanwhile, without particular intention on their part, and quite unsuitably, a child was born – well, that involved expense; the son fell ill – more expense, and died – yet more expense; his wife is ill; she has some chronic ailment or other: in other words he is been suffering, suffering badly. He says, however, that he expects a satisfactory decision on his case in a few days' time, and that this time there can be no doubt of it whatsoever. I felt sorry, sorry, oh, so sorry for him, little mother! I showed him kindness. He is a lost, frightened man; he is looking for someone to look after him, and that is why I showed him kindness. Well, goodbye, little mother, Christ be with you, keep well. My little dove! I have only to remember you, and it is like having a medicine applied to my sick soul, and even though I suffer for you, that suffering is easy for me.

Your true friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 9

Varvara Alekseyevna, Little Mother!

I am beside myself as I write this to you. I am thoroughly agitated by a terrible thing which has happened. My head is whirling round. I feel as though everything were spinning around me. Oh, my darling, what a thing I have to tell you now! This we did not foresee. No, I do not believe that I did not foresee it; I foresaw it all. My heart sensed it in advance! I even dreamed of something similar the other night.

This is what happened! I shall tell you without regard for style, just as the Good Lord puts the words into my head. I went to the department today. I arrived, sat down, and started to write. I should also tell you, little mother, that I had been writing the day before as well. Well, it was like this: Timofey Ivanovich came to me yesterday with an order for a document which was required in a hurry. 'Please copy it cleanly, swiftly and carefully, Makar Alekseyevich,' he said. 'It is to be signed today.' I should observe, little angel, that I was not quite myself yesterday, and had no interest in anything; such were the sadness and depression that had overtaken me. My heart was cold and my soul was dark; my memory held nothing but you, my poor little treasure. Well, so I got down to the task of copying; I did the work cleanly and well, except that – I don't know how to explain it to you, whether it was the work of the Unclean One, whether it had been preordained by some secret Fate, or whether it simply had to happen that way – I left out a whole line; Lord knows what sense it must have made, it simply didn't make any. There was a delay over the delivery of the document, and it wasn't handed to His Excellency for signature until today. I reported for work this morning at the usual time and stationed myself beside Yemelyan Ivanovich. I should observe to you, my dear, that I have recently begun to feel twice as ashamed and apologetic as I used to. I've recently begun to find it impossible to look at anyone. If anyone is near so much as gives a creak, I feel more dead than alive. That was how it was today: I sat huddled up, not making a sound, like a hedgehog, with the result that Yefim Akimovich (there never was such a bully) said so that everyone could hear: 'What are you sitting there looking so scared for, Makar Alekseyevich?' And he made such a face that absolutely everyone near us split their sides with laughter, at my expense, of course. They laughed, and they laughed! I stuck my fingers in my ears and shut my eyes, just

sat there, not moving. That is what I usually do; that way they usually desist sooner. Suddenly I heard noise, the sound of running footsteps, fuss and bustle; I listened – surely my ears must be deceiving me? My name was being called, someone was asking for me, for Devushkin. My heart began to quiver within me, and I still don't really know why I was so scared; all I know is that I was more scared than I have ever been in my life before. I became rooted to my chair – although nothing were wrong, as though I were not even there. But again the voice started up, coming nearer and nearer. At last it was right next to my ear: 'Devushkin! Devushkin! Where is Devushkin?' I raised my eyes: before me stood Yevstafy Ivanovich; he said: 'Makar Alekseyevich, you've to go to His Excellency, at the double! You've made a mistake in a document!' That was all he said, but it was enough, little mother, don't you think! I went numb, froze, lost all feeling; and began to walk, more dead than alive. I was escorted through one room, through a second, then a third, into a study – I stood before His Excellency! It is impossible for me to give you a positive account of the thoughts that passed through my mind at that moment. I saw His Excellency standing there, and they were all standing around him. I don't think I bowed; I forgot. Struck dumb, I merely stood there, my lips trembling and my legs shaking. And I had reason to be struck dumb, little mother. For one thing, I was ashamed of myself; I took a glance in a mirror to the right of me, and what I saw in it nearly sent me out of my mind. And for another, I have always tried to do my job as though I myself were not actually there. So that it was hardly likely that His Excellency could know of my existence. Perhaps he might have heard in passing, as it were, that there was a member of staff named Devushkin in the department, but he would never have had any close dealings with him.

Angrily, he began: 'What is the meaning of this, sir? Where was your concentration? An important document, urgently required, and you go and spoil it. What is the meaning of it, eh?' At that point His Excellency turned to Yevstafy Ivanovich. I could only hear certain isolated words and phrases: 'Negligence! Indiscretion! You will get us into trouble!' For some reason I suddenly had an urge to open my mouth. I wanted to beg forgiveness, but could not, I wanted to flee, but dared not attempt to, and then... then, little mother, something happened that even now makes the pen want to fall from my hand. One of my metal buttons – the devil take it – a button

which had been hanging from my uniform by a thread – suddenly fell off (I must have brushed against it by accident), bounced on the floor with a ping, and rolled straight, just like that, the accursed object, to His Excellency's feet – and this while everyone was completely silent, too! There went any hope I might have had of excusing myself, of making an apology, of accounting for my misdeed – all the things I had been preparing to say to His Excellency! What happened next was dreadful. His Excellency at once fastened his attention on my appearance and on what I was wearing. I recalled what I had seen in the mirror: I rushed to retrieve the button! I lost my head! I stooped down and tried to get hold of the button, but it spun and rolled, in short, I couldn't catch hold of it, and gave a fine display of dexterity in the process. Then I suddenly felt the last of my strength desert me, and knew that all, all was lost! My entire reputation was ruined, I was finished as a human being! And then, for no reason at all, I started to hear the voices of Teresa and Falcon, and my ears began to ring. At last I managed to retrieve the button, got to my feet, straightened myself up, and had I not been such a fool I would have stood to attention and kept still. But oh, no: I began pressing the button against the torn-off threads, as though that would make it stay on again; and, what is more, I smiled, and smiled again. At first His Excellency turned away, but then he glanced at me again – I could hear him saying to yevstafy Voinovich: 'What on earth?... Look at the state he is in!... How does he... What does he...' Oh, my darling, the sound of those words! I knew that this time I had truly excelled myself! I heard yevstafy Voinovich say: 'He has a good record, has never put a foot wrong—exemplary conduct, draws a reasonable salary, in accordance with his grade...' Well, do something to ease his position,' said His Excellency. 'Give him something in advance.' 'But he's already been paid,' Yevstafy Voinovich replied. 'He's been paid in advance for ages now. He must be having some difficulties or other – but he's always shown good conduct, and he's got a good record, a spotless record.' I burned, my little angel, I burned in the fires of hell! I died inwardly! 'Well,' His Excellency said in a loud voice, 'it must be copied out again, and quickly; Devshkin, come here and copy it out again, without mistakes this time; and listen...' At that point His Excellency turned to the other people present and issued various instructions; then they all went their separate ways. No sooner had they dispersed than His Excellency hurriedly took

out his pocket-book and produced a hundred ruble note from it. 'Here,' he said. 'It is the least I can do, look on it as you please...'—and he shoved it into my hand. My angel, I gave a start of shock, my whole being was shaken; I don't know what came over me—I tried to kiss his hand. But he blushed all over, my little dove, and—I depart from the truth by not one hair is breaddi, my darling—he took my unworthy hand and shook it, shook it properly as though it were the hand of someone who was his equal, someone equal in rank to himself, a general. 'Off you go,' he said, 'it is the least I can do... Don't make any more mistakes, but on this occasion we'll manage to get by.'

Now, little mother, this is what I have decided: I ask you and Fedora – and if I had any children, I would ask them, too – to say your prayers henceforth in the following manner: to pray, not for your fathers, but for His Excellency, and to do so each day and every day until the end of your lives! I also want to say this, little mother – and I say it solemnly, listen carefully, little mother: I swear that no matter how afflicted by mental agony I was in the cruel days of our misfortunes when I looked at you, at the miseries you had to suffer, and at myself, at my degradation and my incompetence, in spite of all that I swear that the hundred rubles are less dear to me than the fact that His Excellency himself deigned to shake my unworthy hand, wretch and drunkard that I am! By doing that he restored me to himself. By that action he has resurrected my spirit, has made my life sweeter for ever, and I am firmly convinced that, no matter how grievously I may have sinned in the eyes of the All-Highest, my prayer for the happiness and prosperity of His Excellency will reach His throne...

Little mother! I am now in a dreadful state of mental disarray and agitation! My heart is thumping as if it wanted to leap out of my breast. At the same time, I seem to have lost all my energy. I am sending you forty-five paper rubles; I am giving the landlady twenty, and leave thirty-five for myself: I'll spend twenty on setting my clothes to rights, and keep fifteen for daily expenses. The only thing is that all these events which took place this morning have shaken my being to its foundations. I am going to go to bed. But I feel peaceful, very peaceful. Only there is a crack in my soul, and I can hear it trembling, quivering, stirring deep inside me. I shall come and see you: but for the moment I am simply intoxicated by

all these sensations... God sees it all, my little mother, my priceless little dove!

Your worthy friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 10

My dear Makar Alekseyevich,

I cannot tell you how glad I am about your good fortune; and I can also understand the effect your superior is benevolent actions must have had on you, my friend. So now you can rest from your woes! Only for God is sake don't go wasting money again. Try to live as quiet, as modest an existence as possible, and starting from today begin putting something by each day so that misfortune may not take you unawares a second time. For heaven is sake don't worry about us. Fedora and I will get by somehow. Why have you sent us such a lot of money, Makar Alekseyevich? We really don't need it. We are content with what we have already. To be sure, we shall soon need money for our move from this apartment, but Fedora has hopes of receiving repayment of an old debt of many years. I shall, however, keep twenty rubles in case of emergencies. I am sending the rest back to you. Please look after it, Makar Alekseyevich. Goodbye. Live quietly now, look after your health and be of good cheer. I would write you more, but am experiencing a dreadful sense of tiredness – yesterday I stayed in bed all day. Your promise to look in is a sensible one. Please pay me a visit, Makar Alekseyevich.

V. D.

September 11

My dear Varvara Alekseyevna,

I beg you, my darling, not to part from me now, not now, when my happiness is complete and I want for nothing. My little dove! Don't pay any attention to what Fedora says – I will do everything you ask; I will behave well and mind my P's and Q is – my respect for His Excellency alone prompts me to do that; we shall write each other happy letters again, we shall confide to each other our thoughts, our joys, and our concerns, if concerns there be; we shall live alongside each other in happiness and concord. We shall study literature... My little angel! My fortunes have changed, and everything has taken a turn for the better. The landlady has become more compliant, Teresa has become more intelligent, even Faldoni is quicker on his feet these days. I have settled my differences with Ratazyayev. I went to him of my own accord, to celebrate. I must admit he's a good fellow, little mother, and all the bad things people have been saying about him are a lot of nonsense. I have now discovered that all that was pernicious slander. He had absolutely no intention of writing about us: he told me that himself. He read me a new thing he's written. And when he called me 'Lovelace' that time, it wasn't meant as an insult or as some kind of improper epithet: he explained it to me. It's a straight borrowing from foreign literature, and means 'Mr Quick-On-His-Toes', and if one is to express it more elegantly, in more literary fashion, then it means 'a fellow with whom one should not meddle' – there! And not whatever it was I thought. It was an innocent joke, my little angel. And there I went, uneducated as I am, and foolishly took offence. And indeed, now I've apologized to him... The weather is first-rate today, Varenka, really fine. Oh, to be sure, there was a bit of drizzle this morning, which felt as though it had been strained through a sieve. But it was nothing! It made the air a bit fresher. I went out and bought a wonderful pair of boots. I strolled along the Nevsky. I read the *Bee** Oh! But I'm forgetting to tell you the most important part.

You see, this is what happened:

This morning I was talking to Yemelyan Ivanovich and Aksenty Mikhailovich about His Excellency. You know, Varenka, I am not

the only person to whom he has been so generous. I am not the only person whom he has shown such favour – he is renowned for his kindheartedness far and wide. From many quarters people sing his praises, and shed tears of gratitude. He brought up an orphan girl in his house. He made all the arrangements for her: married her off to a certain man, a government clerk who lived in His Excellency is home and did special assignments. He got the son of a certain widow a position in a government office, and has done many other benevolent deeds of a similar kind. I considered it my duty, little mother, to make my own small contribution, and I told everyone about what His Excellency had done: I told them everything and concealed nothing. I swallowed my pride. What role could a thing like pride or reputation play in a situation like that? I told it all out loud – to the glory of the doings of His Excellency! I spoke enthusiastically and with ardour, and I did not blush – on the contrary, I was proud to have the occasion to tell such a story. I described it all to them (though I was sensible enough to keep quiet about you, little mother): my landlady, Faldoni, Ratazyayev, Markov, my boots – all of it. One or two of them exchanged smiles with one another; in fact, they all exchanged a few smiles. I expect they just thought there was something ridiculous about the way I looked, or perhaps it was what I told them about my boots – yes, that must have been it. But I don't believe they did it with any malicious intention. It was simply their youth, or the fact that they are rich; I absolutely refuse to believe that they were laughing at what I had to say with any evil or malicious intention. What I mean is that since I was saying it all in relation to His Excellency, they could not possibly have done that, could they, Varenka?

I still have not really recovered from it all, little mother. All these events have simply reduced me to confusion! Do you have firewood? Don't catch cold, Varenka; it is so easy to catch cold. Oh, my little mother, you will be the death of me with those melancholy thoughts of yours. I am entreating with God for you, how I am entreating with Him, little mother! That, for example, you should have woollen stockings and warm underclothes. Look to yourself, my little dove. If you should need anything, then in the name of the Creator do not offend an old man. Just come straight to me. The bad times are over now. Do not worry on my account. Everything that lies ahead is so good and bright!

Yes, it was a sad time, Varenka! But never mind, it's gone, finished with. The years will roll by, and we will sigh even for that time. I remember the years of my youth. They couldn't have been better – though I frequently had not a copeck in my pocket. I was cold and hungry, but at least I was cheerful. I would walk down the Nevsky of a morning, encounter a pretty little face, and be happy all day afterwards. That was a glorious, glorious time, little mother! It is good to be alive, Varenka! Especially in St Petersburg. Yesterday I repented with tears in my eyes, asking the Lord God to forgive me all the sins I committed in that sad time: my discontent, my liberal ideas, my debauchery and gambling. I mentioned you in my prayers with tender emotion. It was you alone, my little angel, who gave me support, who consoled me, admonished me with your good counsel and your exhortations. I will never be able to forget that, little mother. I have kissed all your letters today, my little dove! Well, goodbye, little mother. I have been told that there are clothes being sold somewhere not far from here. So I shall see what I can find out. Goodbye, then, little angel. Goodbye!

Your sincerely devoted

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 15

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

I am in a dreadful state of agitation. Listen to what has happened to us. I have a premonition of something fateful. Judge for yourself, my precious friend: Mr Bykov is in St Petersburg. Fedora met him. He was driving by, ordered the droshky to stop, went up to Fedora himself and began to enquire where she lived. At first she wouldn't oblige him. Then he told her with an ironic smile that he knew who was living with her. (Anna Fyodorovna had apparently told him everything.) Then Fedora lost her patience and began to upbraid him and reproach him right there on the street, telling him that he was a man with no morals, that it was he who was the cause of all my unhappiness. He replied that when people haven't a copeck to their names they are bound to be unhappy. Fedora told him that I might well have been able to earn my living, might even have found a husband or, failing that, obtained a

position somewhere, but that now my happiness was lost for ever, that I was ill, moreover, and would soon die. In reply to this he observed that I was still far too young, that my head was still in a ferment and that *even our virtues were getting a little tarnished* (his words). Fedora and I thought he didn't know where our apartment was, but then suddenly, yesterday, just after I had gone out to do some shopping in the Gostiny Dvor, he walked into our room; he apparently wished to avoid me. He spent a long time asking Fedora questions about the life we were leading; he examined all our possessions, looked at my work, and then asked: 'Who's this clerk who knows you?' At that moment you were crossing the yard; Fedora pointed you out to him; he looked, and smiled his ironic smile; Fedora begged him to go away, told him that I was already ill with distress as it was, and that to see him in our room would be very unpleasant for me. For a while he remained silent; then he said he had simply come to see us for want of anything better to do, and tried to give Fedora twenty-five rubles, which she of course refused. What would it have meant if she had accepted them? Why did he come to see us? I cannot fathom how it is that he knows all about us! I am lost in conjectures. Fedora says that her sister-in-law Aksinya who comes visiting us knows a washerwoman called Nastasya and that this Nastasya has a cousin who is a janitor in the same department where a friend of Anna Fyodorovna is nephew works – so isn't it possible that some malicious gossip has been going the rounds? But it may very well be that Fedora is mistaken; we don't know what to think. Will he really come to see us again? The very thought horrifies me! When Fedora told me all this yesterday I was so frightened that I nearly fainted from terror. What more does he want? I don't want to know him now! What business does he have with me, poor woman that I am? Oh, in what fear I live now; I keep thinking that Bykov will come in at any moment. What is to become of me? What else does fate have in store for me? For the love of Christ, come and see me now, Makar Alekseyevich. Please, for the love of God, come and see me.

V. D.

September 18

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

There took place in our lodging-house today an even that was unbearably sad, thoroughly inexplicable and quite unexpected. Our poor Gorshkov (I must tell you this first, little mother) has completely acquitted himself. The court's decision was made public a long time ago, but today he went to hear the final judgement. The case ended very happily for him. Whatever the suspicions of negligence and indiscretion that had been entertained against him, he was cleared of them all. The merchant was ordered to pay him a hefty sum of money, with the result that his circumstances were greatly improved; the stain on his honour was removed, and everything was better for him – in short, he had received the most complete fulfilment of his desires. He arrived home at three o'clock this afternoon. He looked terrible, his face was as white as a sheet, his lips were trembling, yet he was smiling – he embraced his wife and children. We all descended on him in a horde to congratulate him. He was thoroughly moved by our action, bowed in all directions, and shook hands with each of us several times. I even thought he had grown a few inches in height and straightened up, and he didn't have those tears in his eyes as he usually did. He was in such a state of agitation, poor chap. He couldn't keep still for two minutes on the same spot; he would pick up anything he chanced to find, then put it down again, smiling and bowing all the time without cease; he would sit down, stand up, sit down again, start talking – my, how he talked! – saying God only knows what: 'My honour, my honour, my good name, my children,' and even weeping. Most of us also shed a few tears. Ratazyayev clearly wished to cheer him up, and said: 'What good's honour, old chap, if you've nothing to eat; it's money, old chap, money that is the main thing; and it's that you should be thanking God for!' – and he slapped him on the shoulder. I thought Gorshkov looked offended; that's to say, he didn't actually express his displeasure openly, but just gave Ratazyayev a funny look and took his hand off his shoulder. He wouldn't have done that before, little mother! But people's characters differ. For example, if I had been so fortunate I would never have acted the proud fellow like that; I mean, my darling, sometimes one bows too much and humiliates oneself for the sole reason that one has suffered a fit of good will and excessive softness of heart... but it is not I we are talking about here! 'Yes,' he said, 'money's good too; praise be to God, praise be to God!' And after that, during all the time we remained in his room, he kept

saying 'Praise be to God, praise be to God!' His wife ordered a rather special dinner, and lots of it. Our landlady cooked it for them herself. Our landlady is sometimes a kindhearted woman. But until the dinner was ready Gorshkov was unable to sit still. He went to see everyone in their rooms, whether they invited him in or not. He would simply walk in, smile, sit down on a chair, say a few words, or sometimes remain silent – and go away again. When he went to see the warrant-officer he even played cards; they made him join in as fourth hand in their game. He played for a while, then for a little while longer, made a mess of his hand, played three or four rounds and then gave up. 'No,' he said, 'but you see I'm just passing, that's all, just passing' – and left their company. When he ran into me in the passage he seized me by both hands and looked me straight in the face, only he did it in a thoroughly odd manner; then he shook my hand and wandered off, smiling all the while, but with a smile that was somehow strange and heavy, like that of a corpse. His wife was weeping for joy; everything in their room was so cheerful, as though it had been arranged for a holiday. They consumed their dinner quickly. After they had eaten, he said to his wife: 'Listen, my dear, I'm going to take a nap for a while,' and he went to bed. He called his daughter to his side, put his hand on her little head and stroked it for a long, long time. Then he turned to his wife once more: 'But what about Petenka?' he said. 'Petya, our Petenka?...' His wife made the sign of the cross over herself and replied that he was dead. 'Yes, yes, I know, I know it all, Petenka's in the kingdom of heaven now.' His wife could see that he was not himself, that the things which had taken place had completely shaken and astounded him, and she said to him: 'You ought to sleep for a while, my dear.' 'Yes, very well, in a moment I will... I'm a bit...' Here he turned away, lay for a while, then turned back again and tried to say something. His wife couldn't make out what it was, and she asked him: 'What is it you want, my friend?' But he made no reply. She waited for a little. 'Well,' she thought, 'he is fallen asleep.' And she went to see the landlady for an hour or so. An hour later she returned – she saw that her husband had not yet woken up, and that he lay there without moving. In the belief that he was asleep, she sat down and began to busy herself with some work or other. She says now that she worked for half an hour and was so absorbed in her thoughts that she cannot even remember what it was she was thinking about, only that she had forgotten about her husband.

Then a sense of alarm suddenly made her wake up, and what struck her most of all was the tomb-like silence in the room. She looked over at the bed and saw that her husband was still lying in the same position. She went over to him, tugged the coverlet aside, looked – and saw that he was cold as cold – he had died, little mother, Gorshkov had suddenly died, as if smitten by a thunderbolt! And what he died of – God alone knows. It so overwhelmed me, Varenka, that I still can't get over it even now. It's simply impossible to believe that a man can die with so little fuss. What a poor miserable devil that Gorshkov was! Oh, what a fate, what a fate! His wife was in tears, fairly terrified out of her wits. The girl has gone to hide in a corner somewhere. There's a terrible commotion in their room; a forensic investigation is going to be carried out... I don't know all the details for certain. But I'm sorry for them, oh so sorry! It's so sad to think that one really can have no knowledge of the day or the hour... One will die just like that, for no reason...

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 19

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam,

I hasten to inform you, my friend, that Ratazyayev has found me work with a certain author. Someone came to see him with a great thick manuscript – praise be to God, it's a lot of work. The only thing is that it's so illegibly written that I can't seem to make much sense of it... They've agreed to pay me forty copecks per printer's sheet. I'm telling you this, my dear, so you will know that we shall now have some extra money. Well, and now goodbye, little mother. I must set straight to work.

Your faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 23

Makar Alekseyevich, my dear friend,

It's three days now since I wrote anything to you – but I have

had a lot, a lot of troubles, a lot of anxiety.

The day before yesterday Bykov came to see me. I was alone, Fedora had gone off somewhere. I opened the door to him, and was so terrified when I saw him that I could not move from the spot. I could feel myself going pale. He came in as he usually does, with his loud laughter, took a chair and sat down. For a long time I could not summon my wits together; in the end I sat down in the corner with my work. Soon he stopped laughing. I think my appearance shocked him. I have become very thin of late; my cheeks and eyes have grown sunken, and I was as white as a sheet... it would really be quite difficult for someone who had known me a year ago to recognize me now. He looked at me long and fixedly, and then finally cheered up again. He said something or other; I don't remember what I said in reply, but he burst out laughing again. He sat there in my room for a whole hour, talked to me for a long time, asking me about something. Finally, before taking his leave of me, he took me by the hand and said (these were his exact words): 'Varvara Alekseyevna! Between you and me, Anna Fyodorovna, your relative and my intimate friend and companion, is a very nasty piece of work.' (Here he also used an indecent word to refer to her.) 'She also led your female cousin astray, and ruined you. As regards myself, I behaved like a cad in that affair, too – but then, it happens every day.' At that point he fairly chortled with laughter. Then he commented that he was no master of eloquence, that he had already told me the most important things which ought to be explained to me and about which the obligations of decency forbade him to remain silent, and that he would proceed to the remaining matters in brief terms only. Here he announced to me that he sought my hand in marriage, that he considered it his duty to restore to me my honour, that he was rich, that after the wedding he would take me away to his village in the steppes, that he wanted to go hare-coursing there; that he would never come back to St Petersburg again, because it was a vile city, that in it he had, as he put it, a 'no-good nephew' whom he had sworn to deprive of his inheritance, and that it was for this very reason – that of acquiring some lawful inheritors – that he sought my hand, this being the main purpose of his suit. Then he observed that I was living in very straitened circumstances, that it was no wonder I was ill, living in such a hovel, predicted that I would inevitably die if I were to remain there even one month longer, said that rented

accommodation in St Petersburg was vile, and finally asked me if there was anything I wanted.

I was so shocked by his proposal that – I don't know why – I burst into tears. He interpreted this as a sign of gratitude and told me that he had always been convinced I was a goodhearted, sensitive and educated woman, but that he had not been able to bring himself to take this step until he had made detailed enquiries as to my present behaviour. Then he enquired about you, said he had heard all about you, that you were a man of decent principles, that he for his part did not want to be in your debt and asked if five hundred rubles would suffice to pay you for all you had done for me. When I explained to him that what you had done for me could never be paid for in money, he told me that that was just a lot of romantic nonsense, that I was young and read too many poems and novels, that novels were the ruin of young girls, that books were harmful to morality and that he could not endure books of any kind; he advised me to wait until I was his age before making judgements about people. 'Then you'll have some idea,' he added. Then he told me to think his proposal over carefully, that he would find it very displeasing were I to take such an important step rashly, added that rashness and impulsiveness could be the ruin of inexperienced youth, but that he greatly desired a favourable reply from me, and that if such a reply were not forthcoming he would be compelled to marry a merchant's daughter in Moscow, because, he said, 'I have sworn to deprive that no-good nephew of mine of his inheritance.' He forced me to accept the five hundred rubles – 'isweet-money', as he put it; he said that in the country I would 'grow as round as a doughnut', that in his house I would live in clover, that he had a fearful amount of business to attend to just now, that he trudged around all day seeing to it and that he had dropped in to see me between two appointments. Then he left. I thought for a long time, I redianded on a great many things and went through agonies of indecision as I did so, my friend; and at last I made up my mind. My friend, I am going to marry him. I must accept his proposal. If there is anyone who can save me from my shame, restore to me my honourable reputation, and rescue me from poverty, deprivation and unhappiness, it is him, and him alone. What more can I expect from the future, what more can I ask of fate? Fedora says one mustn't sacrifice one's happiness. 'What is happiness in a case like this?' she says. At any rate, I can't see

another way forward for myself, my precious friend. What would I do? I have ruined my health with work as it is; I cannot work all the time. Become a serving-maid? I would die of misery, and in any case I'd be no good to anyone. I'm sickly by nature, and so I'll always be a burden to others. Of course, I know I'm not exactly going to paradise now, but what else can I do? What choice do I have?

I have not asked you for advice. I wanted to think the matter over by myself. The decision you have just read is unalterable, and I am going to tell Bykov of it forthwith – he is pressing me to make a final decision even as it is. He says his business will not wait, he has to leave town, and he can't postpone it just because of trivia. God knows whether I will be happy, my fate is in His holy, ineffable power, but I have made up my mind. Bykov is said to be a kind man; he will respect me; perhaps I will respect him, too. What more can be expected of our marriage?

I shall keep you informed of everything, Makar Alekseyevich. I am certain that you will understand the full extent of my anguish. Do not seek to deflect me from my intention. Your exertions will be in vain. Try to weigh over in your own heart all the factors that have prompted me to act in this fashion. I was very anxious at first, but now I am calmer. What lies ahead I do not know. What will be, will be; as God decides!...

Bykov has arrived; I am leaving this letter unfinished. There was much more which I wanted to tell you. Bykov is in the room!

V. D.

September 23

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

I hasten to reply to you, little mother; I hasten to tell you, little mother, that I am amazed. This is somehow all wrong... We buried Gorshkov yesterday. Yes, it is right, Varenka, it is right; Bykov has acted honourably; only you are agreeing to his proposal, my darling. Of course, God is will's in all things; it is right, it must unquestionably be right – that is to say, God's will must be in this; and the providence of the Heavenly Creator is, of course, blessed

and unfathomable, and human fates, too – they are the same. And you have the sympathy of Fedora, too. Of course, now you will be happy, little mother, you will have a sufficiency of everything, my little dove, my little treasure, my beloved, my little angel – only Varenka, why are you doing it so quickly?... Yes, business... Mr Bykov has business to attend to – of course, who hasn't? he is just as likely to have business to attend to as the next person... I saw him as he was leaving the house after seeing you. He's a fine figure of a man, a fine figure of a man; even a very fine figure of a man. It's just that it somehow seems all wrong, it's not really to do with his being a fine figure of a man but rather with the fact that I'm not myself now. It's just that how are we going to write letters to each other now? And I, how am I going to manage alone? My little angel, I'm weighing it all over, all of what you have written to me in your letter; I am weighing them all over in my heart, the reasons you give. I had just finished copying the twentieth printer's sheet, and all the while these happenings had been taking place! Little mother, I mean, here you are setting off on a journey – you'll need to buy various items, like shoes and a dress, and it just so happens that I know of a shop in Gorokhovaya Street; you remember the one – I described it to you before. But no! How can you, little mother, what are you thinking of? I mean, you can't go just now – it's quite impossible, quite out of the question. I mean, you will need to do a great deal of shopping and arrange for a carriage. What's more, the weather is bad just now; just look out of your window – the rain's simply pouring down, and it's such a wetting rain, and you'll... you'll get so cold, my little angel; your little heart will get cold! I mean, you're afraid of strangers, yet here you are setting off with this man. And who will I have once you are gone? I know that Fedora says that great happiness awaits you... but she's an ungovernable woman and she wants to ruin me. Will you be at the all-night service tonight, little mother? I would go merely in order to look at you. It's true, little mother, it's perfectly true that you're an educated woman, virtuous and sensitive – it's just that he'd do better to marry the merchant's daughter! What do you think, little mother? Don't you think that's what he ought to do? As soon as it gets dark I shall look in and see you for a little while, my Varenka. It's getting dark early today, and I shall look in. Little mother, I shall come and see you for a little while today without fail. You'll be waiting for Bykov to arrive now, but when he leaves, then... Just

wait, little mother, and I shall look in...

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 27

Makar Alekseyevich, my friend,

Mr Bykov has said that I must have three dozen linen chemises. So I must find seamstresses to make at least two dozen as quickly as possible, and we have very little time. Mr Bykov keeps losing his temper, saying that I am making far too much of a fuss about 'these rags'. Our wedding is in five days' time, and we are to travel the day after. Mr Bykov is in a hurry, he says we mustn't waste so much time on nonsense. I am worn out by all my worries, and can hardly stay on my feet. There is a terrible amount of business to attend to, and I really think it would have been better if this had never come to pass. What is more: we don't have enough silk or lace, so I shall have to buy some, as Mr Bykov says he doesn't want his wife to go around looking like a kitchenmaid, and that I really must 'wipe those landowners' wives' noses for them'. That's how he puts it. So I wonder, Makar Alekseyevich, if you could please go and see Madame Chiffon on Gorokhovaya Street and ask her a) to send us some seamstresses and b) to make the effort and come and see us herself. I am unwell today. It's so cold in our new apartment, and everything is in such terrible chaos. Mr Bykov's aunt is so old that she is only barely alive. I am afraid she may die before we manage to get away, but Mr Bykov says it is nothing, she will get over it. Everything in our house is in a dreadful state of turmoil. Mr Bykov is not living on the premises, and so the servants have all gone off, God knows where. Sometimes there is only Fedora to attend to our needs: Mr Bykov's valet, who looks after everything, has been missing for three days now. Mr Bykov looks in every morning; he's always in a bad temper and yesterday he administered a beating to the house manager, as a result of which he got into trouble with the police... There has been no one to deliver my letters to you. I am sending this by regular mail. Oh yes! I almost forgot the most important thing. Please tell Madame Chiffon she must change the silk and match it with the pattern we chose yesterday; tell her she must come and show me the new silk she has selected. And tell her also that I have given some thought to the *canezou*;^{*} that it needs to

be crocheted. And in addition: the letters of the monograms on the handkerchiefs must be done in *tambour à broder*, do you hear? *Tambour*, and not satin-stitch. See you don't forget it is to be *tambour*! Oh, and there's something else I'd almost forgotten: please, for the love of God, tell her that the leaves on the cape are to be sewn in relief, and the tendrils and thorns in *cordonnnet*, and then the collar is to be done in lace or wide furbelows. Please make sure you tell her this, Makar Alekseyevich.

Your

V. D.

PS I feel so guilty about troubling you with my errands. It was only the other day that you spent the whole morning running around for my sake. But what can I do? The house is in chaos, and I am unwell. So please don't be annoyed with me, Makar Alekseyevich. I'm so depressed! Oh, what will become of me, my friend, my dear, good Makar Alekseyevich? I'm afraid to look into the future. I have a certain premonition of what will happen, and am living in a kind of daze.

PPS Please for the love of God, my friend, don't forget any of what I have told you in this letter. I'm so afraid you may get it wrong. Remember: *tambour à broder*, not satin-stitch.

V. D.

Septembe 27

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam,

I have zealously completed all your errands. Madame Chiffon said she had already had the idea of doing the letters in *tambour*; she said it's more suitable, or something – I don't really know, I didn't understand properly. Oh yes: you wrote something in your letter about the furbelows, and she, too, said something about it. The only thing is, little mother, that I've forgotten what it was. All I remember is that she said an awful lot – the revolting woman! What was it, now? Oh, she'll tell you herself what it was. I'm absolutely exhausted, little mother. I didn't go in to the office today. But don't despair, little mother – I am prepared to go round all the stores for the sake of your peace of mind. You write that you are afraid to

look into the future. Well, at seven o'clock this evening all will be revealed to you. Madame Chiffon herself will call on you in person. So don't despair; have hope, little mother; everything may yet work out for the best – just you wait. For some reason I keep seeing those accursed furbelows – oh I can't stand them, those furbelows, furbelows! I would have dropped in to see you, little angel, I would have, honestly I would; in fact, I've been up to the gates of your house a couple of times now. But Bykov is always there! What I mean is that Mr Bykov is such a bad-tempered fellow, so it wouldn't be the right thing to do... Well, it doesn't matter!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 28

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Please, for the love of God, go and see the jeweller and tell him not to make the pearl and emerald earrings. Mr Bykov says it's too extravagant, it will cost too much. he is in a bad mood; he says that it is hurting his pocket enough as it is, and that we are robbing him; and yesterday he said that if he had known there would be all this expense he would never have agreed to marry me in the first place. He says that as soon as the wedding is over we are going away – there are to be no guests, that I needn't expect any dancing or la-da-ing, and that Christmas is still a long way off. That is the way he talks! But, as God's my witness, I don't need all these things. It's Mr Bykov who ordered them. I don't dare to answer him back: he's so hot-tempered. What is to become of me?

V. D.

September 28

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove,

I – what I mean is, the jeweller said it's all right; I was going to begin by telling you that I've been taken ill and can't get out of bed. I would have to go and catch a cold now, at such a busy time when there are so many urgent things to be seen to, the devil take it! I am also writing to inform you that, to complete my store of misfortune,

His Excellency has flown off the handle – he lost his temper with Yemelyan Ivanovich, too, and shouted at him, so that the poor fellow was worried nearly to death. So you see, I am keeping you informed of everything. I wanted to tell you something else, too, but I'm afraid of causing you too much trouble. After all, little mother, I'm just a simple, stupid fellow, I just write whatever comes into my head, and you might very well not wish to – well, it doesn't matter!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 29

Varvara Alekseyevna, my darling!

I saw Fedora today, my little dove. She said you are getting married tomorrow, that the day after you are going away and that Mr Bykov is already hiring the horses. I have already informed you of His Excellency's behaviour, little mother. Oh, there is something else: I have checked the bills from the shop in Gorokhovaya Street; they are all correct, but the things are all very expensive. So why is it you at whom Mr Bykov lets fly his bad temper? Well, be happy, little mother! I am glad; yes, and I will go on being glad, as long as you are happy. I would come to the church service, little mother, but I can't, I have lumbago. I am still worried about our letters: who will deliver them for us now, little mother? Yes! You have been a friend and protector to Fedora, my darling. That is a good deed that you have done, my friend; that is a very good deed that you have done. A good deed! And for each of your good deeds the Lord will bless you. Good deeds do not go unrewarded, and virtue will sooner or later be adorned with the crown of divine justice. Little mother! There is much that I would like to write you – I could spend each and every hour, each and every minute of the day just writing and writing to you! I still have one of your books, *Tales of Belkin*. You know, little mother, I would like to ask you to let me keep it – make me a present of it, my little dove. It's not even that I feel like reading it so much just now. But you know yourself how it is, little mother: winter is approaching, the evenings will be long, one will be sad, and then one will feel like reading. I am going to move out of my lodging into your old apartment and rent it together with

Fedora. I would not part from that honest woman now for anything in the world; what's more, she's such a hard worker. I made a careful inspection of your empty apartment yesterday. Your lace-frame there, and your sewing on it, have not been touched: they are in the corner. I examined your sewing. There were still one or two scraps of cloth lying about. You had begun to wind some of your thread round one of my miserable letters. In the little bureau I found a sheet of paper with the words 'Makar Alekseyevich, Sir, I am in a hurry' on it – nothing more. Someone had evidently interrupted you just as you were getting to the most interesting part. Your little bed still stands in the corner, behind the screen... My little dove!!! Well, goodbye, goodbye; for the love of God, write me some reply to this miserable letter as soon as you are able.

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 30

Makar Alekseyevich, my precious friend!

It is all done! My lot is cast; I have no knowledge of what it is to be, but I am obedient to the Lord's will. Tomorrow we leave. I bid you goodbye for the last time, my precious one, my friend, my benefactor, my darling! Don't grieve for me, live happily, remember me, and may God's blessing descend on you! I shall remember you often in my thoughts and in my prayers. At last this time is finished! I take into my new life little that is joyful from my memories of the past; all the more precious, then, will be my memory of you, all the more precious will you be to my heart. You are my only friend; you are the only person here who has loved me. I saw it all, I know how you loved me! One smile from me was enough to make you happy, one line of my handwriting. Now you will have to learn how to live without me. How will you manage alone here? Who will you have when I am gone, my good, precious, only friend? I am leaving you the book, my lace-frame, the letter I began, did not write; when you look at those lines, you must imagine the words you would like to hear me say or have me write, all the things I would like to write to you; and what would I not write to you now! Remember your poor Varenka, who loved you so hard. All your letters are at Fedora's, in the top drawer of the chest-of-drawers. You write that you are ill, and Mr Bykov will not let me go out anywhere today. I will write to

you, my friend, I promise I will, but God alone knows what may happen. So let us say goodbye for ever, my friend, my sweet, my darling – for ever!... Oh, how I would hug you if you were here! Goodbye, my friend, goodbye, goodbye. Live happily; be well. I shall pray for you always. Oh, how sad I am, how utterly my soul is oppressed. Mr Bykov is calling me. Your eternally loving

V.

PS My soul is so full now, so full of tears... My tears are choking me, breaking me. Farewell.

God, how sad!

Remember, remember your poor Varenka!

Little mother, Varenka, my little dove, my precious! You are going, you are being taken away! I would rather have the heart torn from my breast than have you wrested from me in this fashion! How can you do this? I mean, you are weeping and yet you are going! I have just received a wretched little letter from you, all smudged with tears. From your letter it appears that you don't want to go; that you are being taken away by force; that you are sorry for me; that you love me! What will your life be like now, and with whom will you be spending it? Your little heart will be so sad, so sick and cold in this place you are going to. Anguish will suck it dry, sadness will split it in two. You will die there, they will put you to rest in the damp earth; there will be no one to shed a tear for you there! Mr Bykov will be off coursing hares all the time... Oh, little mother, little mother! Why have you decided to do this, how could you have decided to take such a step? What have you done, what have you done, what have you done to yourself? I mean, they will send you to the grave there; they will wear you out with work, my little angel. I mean, you are as weak as a feather, little mother. And where was I? Where were my eyes, fool that I am? How could I not have seen that the child was talking nonsense because her brain was affected by fever? When what I should have done was simply to – but no, fool that I was, I thought nothing, I saw nothing, as though that were the right thing to do, as though it had nothing to do with me; I even went out looking for furbelows... No, Varenka, I will get out of bed; by tomorrow, perhaps, I will be better, and then I will get up!... I will throw myself under the wheels of your

carriage, little mother! I won't let you go away! No! What is this, after all? By what right is all this taking place? I shall leave with you; I shall run after your carriage, if you won't take me with you, I shall run until I am exhausted, until there is no breath left in my body. Have you any idea of what it is like where you are going, little mother? Perhaps you haven't; well, I can tell you! There there is the steppe, my dear, the steppe, the bare steppe; as bare as the palm of my hand! There there are callous peasant women, uneducated muzhiks, drunkards. There by this time of the year the leaves have fallen from the trees, it rains all the time, it is cold – and that is where you are going! Well, Mr Bykov will have something to keep him busy there: he'll be coursing his hares; but what will you do? Perhaps you want to be a landowner's wife, little mother? But my little angel! Take a look at-yourself and tell me if you think you look like a landowner's wife!... Who ever heard of such a thing, Varenka? To whom am I going to write my letters, little mother? Yes, think about that, little mother – ask yourself: 'Who's he going to write his letters to?' Who am I going to call 'little mother'? Who will I be able to call by that affectionate name? How will I ever find you once you are gone, my little angel? I will die, Varenka, I will surely die; my heart will not survive such a misfortune! I have loved you like God's daylight, I have loved you like my own daughter, I have loved everything about you, little mother, my darling! I have lived for you alone! I have worked, copied documents, walked, strolled, and conveyed to you my observations in the form of friendly letters, all because you, little mother, have been living here, opposite me, near me. Perhaps you weren't aware of that, but it was true all the same! Yes, listen, little mother, just think, my dear little dove, how can it be that you shall leave us? My darling, I mean, it is out of the question for you to leave, it is impossible; there is simply not the slightest possibility of such a thing! I mean, look, it is raining, and you are weak, you will catch cold. Your carriage will get wet inside; it will indubitably get wet inside. As soon as you get past the city boundary it will break down; it will break down as sure as eggs are eggs. The carriages they make here in St Petersburg are hopeless! I know those carriage-makers, every one of them; all they do is produce models, toys – it's not solid workmanship. I swear to you, it's not solid. I will go down on my knees to Mr Bykov, little mother; I will explain everything to him, everything! And you, too, little mother, you

must explain to him; explain it to him by force of reason! Tell him that you are staying here, and that it's out of the question for you to go!... Oh, why couldn't he have married that Moscow merchant's daughter? That's what he ought to have done. A merchant's daughter would have suited him better, better by far; I don't need to be told why! And I would have kept you here with me. What is he to you anyway, this Bykov? What's suddenly made him so attractive to you? Perhaps it's because he's forever buying you furbelows, perhaps that's why? But I mean, what are furbelows? What good are they? I mean to say, little mother, they're just rubbish! It's a question of a man's life, and yet here you are, little mother, looking for furbelows – for rags! That is what they are, little mother – rags. Look, as soon as I get the next instalment of my salary I'll buy you some furbelows; I will, little mother; I know the very shop; just give me until I get the next bit of my salary, Varenka! Oh, Lord, Lord! So you really are going away into the steppe with Mr Bykov, and you're never coming back! Oh, little mother!... No, you must write to me again, write me another little letter about it all; and when you have finished your journey, you must write to me from there. Otherwise, my heavenly angel, this will be my last letter; and, I mean, it's impossible that this letter should be my last. I mean, how can it be, so suddenly, my last? No, I will write, and you will write... Otherwise the style I'm developing now won't... Oh, my darling, what is style? I mean, I don't even know what I'm writing, I've absolutely no idea, I know nothing of it, I read none of it over, I never correct my style, I write only in order to write, only in order to write as much as possible to you... My little dove, my darling, my little mother!

THE LANDLADY



A TALE

PART ONE

I

Ordynov had finally summoned up the strength of will to find a new room. His landlady, the very poor, elderly widow of a government clerk, from whom he rented lodgings, had been compelled by unforeseen circumstances to move out of St Petersburg and go and live with relatives somewhere in the wilds – and this she had done without waiting for the first of the month, when his rent was due. As he spent the remaining days in his accustomed refuge, the young man had surveyed it with regret, feeling a sense of vexation at having to abandon it: he was poor, and rented rooms were expensive. The day after his landlady's departure, he had taken his cap and set off wandering through the lanes of St Petersburg, studying all the advertisements that were fixed to the gates of the houses, and selecting the darkest, most crowded and most *solidly built* tenements, where there was the greatest likelihood of finding a corner in the room of some poor lodgers.

For a long time he searched, most diligently, but was soon overtaken by new sensations which he had hardly ever experienced before. At first casually and absent-mindedly, then with

attentiveness, and finally with intense curiosity, he began to look around him. The crowds and the life of the street, the noise, the movement, the novelty of his situation – all the pettiness and commonplace rubbish which the practical and busy citizen of St Petersburg tired of long ago in his fruitless but agitated quest for the possibility of settling down in the peace and quiet of a warm nest somewhere, a nest gained by sweat, toil, and various other means – all this tastelessly coarse ‘prose’ and tedium aroused in Ordynov a sort of quietly joyful, luminous sensation. His pale cheeks were visited by a faint blush, his eyes gleamed as with reawakened hope, and with deep, eager breaths he began to draw into himself the fresh, cold air. His mood had improved beyond all recognition.

He had always led a quiet and completely solitary existence. Three years earlier, having received his degree and having become as far as was possible independent, he had gone to the house of a certain old man, of whom hitherto he had known only from hearsay, waiting for a long time until a liveried butler had consented to announce his presence for the second time. Then, entering a lofty, dark and deserted reception room, thoroughly dreary, of a kind still common in old-fashioned, upper-class family homes which have been spared by time, he had set eyes on the old man, bedecked with medal-ribbons and bedizened with grey hair, a friend and former colleague of his father’s, who was his guardian. The old man handed him a pinch of money. It turned out to be a very insignificant sum; it was what remained of the proceeds from the auction of his great grandfather’s legacy, which had been sold to pay off debts. Ordynov took possession of it with indifference, said farewell to his guardian for ever, and went out on to the street. It was an autumn evening, cold and gloomy; the young man was reflective, and a kind of unconscious sadness was tearing at his heart. His eyes had a burning light in them; he felt feverish, hot and cold by turns. On his way he calculated that he could live on the means he had at his disposal for two or three years – even, with intervals of hunger, for four. Darkness had practically fallen now, and it was spitting with rain. He took the first room that was offered to him, moving into it within the hour. There he shut himself up as though in a monastery cell, as though he had renounced the world for good. By the end of two years he had become a complete recluse.

He had become a recluse without noticing it; during this time it never once occurred to him that there was another kind of life – bustling, noisy, eternally surging, eternally changing, eternally calling and impossible, in the end, to avoid. It was true that he could not help hearing about it, but he had no familiarity with it, and never sought it out. From his earliest childhood he had lived apart from others; now this tendency grew more marked. He was devoured by a passion that is the deepest, most insatiable known to man, one which drains his entire life from him, and which leaves a creature such as Ordynov not one single foothold in the sphere of practical, everyday activity. This passion was book-learning. During this time it gnawed away his youth, poisoned his rest at night with a slow, intoxicating venom, deprived him of wholesome food and fresh air (something which never entered his stuffy cubicle) – and yet, in the ecstasy of his passion, Ordynov refused to notice it. He was young, and for the time being he asked no more. His passion had made him an infant as far as his life in the outer world was concerned, and he was already for ever incapable of making certain good folk stand aside when the necessity arose to mark off some sort of space for himself among them. For some resourceful people book-learning is a kind of ready capital; Ordynov's passion was an armament directed against himself.

In him it took the form of an unconscious drive, rather than a logically intelligible impulse towards instruction and knowledge – and thus it had been in every other activity, no matter how trivial, in which he had engaged. Even as a child he had had a reputation for oddity, and had been unlike his companions. He had never known his parents; because of his strange, unsociable character he had suffered the inhumanity and crude taunts of his fellow children, which had made him truly unsociable and morose, and little by little he had become addicted to seclusion. But never, not even in the present instance, was there any order or preordained system in his solitary studies; all he knew now was the first ecstasy, the first fever, the first delirium of the artist. He was creating a system for himself; it had obsessed him for years, and little by little the vague, obscure, but somehow wonderfully gratifying outline of an idea was taking shape within his soul; the idea was embodied in a new, lucid form, and this form cried out to be released from his soul, tormenting it; he was as yet only timidly aware of its originality, truth and distinctiveness: the creative achievement was already

announcing itself to his energies; it was forming and establishing itself. But the day of creative realization was as yet far off, perhaps very far off – perhaps quite unattainable!

Now he wandered about the streets like an alien outcast, like an anchorite who had suddenly emerged from his silent wilderness into the bustling, noisy city. Everything appeared new and strange to him. But such was his alienation from the world which seethed and rumbled about him that it did not even occur to him to be surprised by the odd sensation he experienced. He seemed not to notice his own withdrawnness; on the contrary, a joyful feeling, bordering on the tipsiness a hungry man feels when he is given food and drink after a long period of starvation, had arisen within him; though it was, of course, strange that such a trivial novelty as a change of rooms was able to agitate and obscure the reason of a citizen of St Petersburg, even Ordynov; but then, it was also true that until that time he had never once gone out ‘on business’.

More and more he found it pleasing to wander about the streets. He stared at everything like a *flâneur**

Even now, however, true to his habitual mood, he read the scene that brightly unfolded before him as if it were a book, between the lines. Everything had an effect on him; he did not miss a single impression and he surveyed the faces of the passers-by with a thoughtful gaze, studied the physiognomy of everyone around him, and listened with affection to the talk of the ordinary people as though in everything he were finding the verification of the conclusions he had reached in the silence of his solitary nights. Often some trivial detail would strike him, giving rise to an idea, and for the first time he started to feel annoyed for having buried himself alive in his cell in the way he had done. Here everything moved faster; his pulse was firm and quick, his intelligence, which had been stifled by solitude, and was sharpened and ennobled only by intense, exalted activity, now functioned swiftly, calmly and boldly. What was more, he had conceived an unconscious desire somehow to squeeze himself into this life which was alien to him, and whose existence he had until this moment only known or, rather, sensed with the instinct of an artist. He found his heart beginning to throb with the pain of love and sympathy. He looked more intently at the people who passed him; but they were strangers, preoccupied and taken up with their own thoughts... And

little by little Ordynov found his carefree mood beginning to wear off; reality was already weighing him down, implanting in him a kind of involuntary fear born of respect. He began to grow tired of the influx of new impressions, hitherto unfamiliar to him, like a sick man who has risen for the first time from his bed and has collapsed, exhausted by the light, the brilliance, the hurly-burly of life, the noise and gaudy tumult of the crowds in their headlong flight past him, bewildered and made giddy by their movement. He grew sad and dejected. He started to have fears about his life, about the whole of his endeavour, and even about the future. A new thought was destroying his peace of mind. It had suddenly occurred to him that all his life he had been alone, that no one had ever loved him, and that he himself had succeeded in loving no one, either. Some of the passers-by with whom at the outset of his walk he had entered into casual conversation were now giving him coarse, strange looks. He saw that they took him for a madman or at least for a most peculiar eccentric, which was not, after all, very far off the mark. He remembered that everyone had always found being in his presence rather difficult, that even in his childhood everyone had avoided him because of his brooding, stubborn character, that his feeling for others had always manifested itself in an awkward, depressed sort of way, and had been imperceptible to them; though such a fellow-feeling had existed in him, there had not been discernible in it any sense of psychological equality, a circumstance which had tormented him as a boy, when he had not resembled the other children, his peers, in any way. Now he remembered and pondered the fact that always, at all times, people had shunned him and avoided him.

Without noticing it, he had reached a district of St Petersburg that lay far from the city centre. After consuming a meal of sorts in a solitary inn, he set off again to continue his wandering. Again he passed through many streets and squares. Beyond them stretched long yellow and grey fences, and instead of well-to-do houses he began to encounter small, thoroughly ramshackle cottages and also the colossal buildings of factories – ugly, blackened and red, with tall smokestacks. Everywhere it was lonely and desolate; everything somehow had a sullen, hostile stare: so, at least, it seemed to Ordynov. It was already evening. At the end of a long lane he came out on to a small square where a parish church was situated.

Without really thinking about it, he went inside. A service had just ended; the church was almost completely empty, and only two old women were still kneeling by the entrance. The votary, a grey-headed old man, was putting out the candles. Rays from the setting sun were flooding down from above in a broad stream through the narrow window of the cupola, bathing one of the chapels in a sea of brilliant light; but they were growing fainter and fainter, and as the dense gloom beneath the vaulted arches grew blacker, the more brightly here and there shone the gilded icons, illumined by the nickering sheen of lamps and candles. In a sudden fit of anguish, which disturbed him deeply from within, and with a sense of some how labouring under a heavy weight, Ordynov leaned against the wall in the darkest corner of the church and for a moment lost consciousness. He regained it as the even, hollow sound of two parishioners walking into the church reverberated under the arches. He raised his eyes, and was seized by an indescribable curiosity at the sight of these two strangers. They were an old man and a young woman. The old man was tall, still erect and vigorous, but emaciated and deathly pale. At first sight one might have taken him for a merchant visiting from some place far away. He wore a long, black fur caftan, which was evidently his Sunday best, and it was unfastened. Underneath the caftan another long-skirted Russian garment was visible, buttoned tightly all the way down. His bare neck was carelessly tied with a bright red kerchief; he was holding a fur hat. His long, straggling beard, which was half grey, reached down to his chest, and from under lowering beetle brows his eyes glittered with a hectic, inflamed light, haughty and staring. The woman was about twenty, and she was wonderfully beautiful. She was wearing an expensive, blue winter jacket lined with fur, and her head was covered with a white satin kerchief tied beneath her chin. She walked with her eyes lowered, and a kind of reflective haughtiness, suffused throughout her entire figure, was echoed sadly and poignantly in the sweet contours of her childishly tender, gentle face. There was something strange about this unusual couple.

The old man came to a halt in the centre of the church and bowed to all four points of the compass, even though the church was quite deserted; his female companion did likewise. Then he took her by the hand and led her up to a large localicon of the Virgin, in whose name the church had been built, which shone near the alter in a blinding rathance of candles, rediance in a mounting

that burned with gold and precious stones. The votary, being the only person left in the church, bowed to the old man with respect, who nodded his head in response. The woman fell prostrate before the icon. The old man lifted up the end of the veil which hung at the base of the icon and covered her head with it. The sound of muffled sobbing was heard in the church.

Ordynov was startled by the solemnity of this scene, and awaited its conclusion with impatience. After a couple of minutes or so, the woman raised her head, and again the bright light of the icon-lamp illuminated her attractive features. Ordynov started, and took a step forward. She had already given her arm to the old man, and they both quietly left the church. Tears were stinging her shadowed, dark-blue eyes, which were lowered beneath long, glittering eyelashes that stood out against the milky whiteness of her features, and were rolling down her blanched cheeks. At her lips a smile flickered; but her face bore the traces of some indeterminate, childlike fear and of a mysterious horror. She was pressing herself fearfully against the old man, and it was evident that she was trembling all over with emotion.

Startled, and whipped on by a pleasurable and stubborn emotion that was unfamiliar to him, Ordynov quickly ran after them and crossed their path as they were coming out of the church porch. The old man gave him a stern, hostile look; she also glanced at him, but without curiosity and in an absent-minded manner, as though she were preoccupied by another, more remote thought. Ordynov had followed them without having any clear idea of why he had done it. By now it was completely dark; he continued to follow them at a distance. The old man and the young woman emerged on to the broad main street, which was muddy and full of various kinds of manufacturing premises, flour-dealers' shops and eating houses, and led straight to the city gates. They turned off it into a long, narrow lane which had long fences running either side of it, flanking the enormous blackened wall of a four-storey tenement building, through whose gates it was possible to reach another main street, also busy and crowded. The couple were already approaching this building; suddenly the old man turned round and looked at Ordynov with impatience. The young man drew up short, as though he had been rooted to the spot; he himself realized the strangeness of the impulse by which he had been

carried away. The old man turned round and stared a second time, as though wishing to confirm that his threatening look had produced the effect he desired, then both he and the young woman passed through the narrow gateway into the yard. Ordynov turned back.

He was in a thoroughly unpleasant state of mind, and was mentally kicking himself for having wasted the day, tired himself out for no reason and, what was even worse, behaved stupidly in having blown the incident up into something out of the ordinary.

However vexed with himself for his unsociability he might have been that morning, it was none the less an instinct with him to avoid anything in the outer world that might distract, startle or shock him in his inner, artistic one. Now he thought of his tranquil room with sadness and a kind of remorse; after that, he suffered an attack of depression and worry about his unsettled position and about the fuss and bother that lay ahead, at the same time annoyed that he could be preoccupied by such a trivial matter. At last, worn out and incapable of putting two ideas together, he limped home to his room, stopping short in amazement when he realized that without noticing he had nearly walked past the house in which he lived. Stunned, and shaking his head at his own absent-mindedness, he ascribed it to exhaustion and, climbing the staircase up to the attic, at long last entered his room. There he lit a candle – and a moment later in his mind's eye he saw a vivid image of the weeping woman. Such was the strength and ardour of the image, so lovingly did his heart reproduce those gentle, tranquil features, riven by a mysterious tenderness and horror, suffused with tears of ecstasy or childish remorse, that his eyes grew misty and fire seemed to shoot through all his limbs. But the vision did not last long. The ecstasy was superseded by reflection, then by a sense of annoyance, and then by a kind of impotent rage; without bothering to undress he wrapped himself in a blanket and threw himself on his hard bed...

It was quite late when Ordynov awoke the following morning in an irritable, timid and depressed state of mind, quickly made himself ready, almost forcibly trying to apply his mind to his immediate practical concerns, and set off in the opposite direction from that of his adventure of the day before; at last he managed to find himself a corner in the garret of a poor German nicknamed Spiess,* who lived alone with his daughter, Tinchén. When he had

been given a deposit, Spiess immediately took down the advertisement which had been nailed to the gate in order to attract prospective tenants, praised Ordynov for his love of learning, and promised to attend to him diligently. Ordynov said he would move in that evening. He was about to return home, but thought better of it and set off in the other direction; his cheerful mood had returned, and he smiled inwardly at his own curiosity. In his impatience the way seemed excessively long; at last he reached the church he had visited the evening before. A mass was in progress. He selected a place from which he could see nearly all the worshippers; but the ones he was looking for were not there. After waiting for a long time, he came out, blushing. He was making a steady effort to suppress an involuntary upsurge of emotion, and he stubbornly forced himself to attempt to alter the trend of his thoughts. As he rediance on ordi-nary, everyday matters, it occurred to him that it was dinner-time and, discovering that he was, indeed, hungry, he visited the same inn where he had dined the day before. For a long time he wandered through lanes both busy and deserted without any conscious purpose, finally reaching a remote area where the town stopped and gave way to an expanse of fields that were turning yellow; he awoke from his reverie only when the deathly silence startled him with a novel sensation, long unfamiliar to him. The day was dry and frosty, of a kind that is not infrequent during a St Petersburg October. Not far away stood an izba; beside it were two ricks of hay; a little horse with sticking-out ribs, its head sagging, its lower lip hanging down, stood unharnessed beside a two-wheeled cart, as though it were reflecting on something. A watchdog growled as it gnawed a bone near a broken wheel, and a three-year-old boy dressed in nothing but a shirt who was scratching the dog's white, shaggy head looked in wonderment at the solitary visitor from town. Behind the izba stretched fields and vegetable gardens. A line of forest showed black against the dark-blue horizon, and in the opposite direction the sky was covered in turbid snowclouds, which seemed to be driving before them a flock of migrating birds that moved across the sky without a cry, one after the other. Every-thing was quiet and somehow imbued with a majestic sadness, full of a kind of dying, conclealed expectation... Ordynov walked further and further; but the emptiness of the place weighed on him. Eventually he turned back towards the town, from which there suddenly wafted a dense rumbling of bells, summoning

the faithful to evening service; he redoubled his stride and within a short space of time had once more entered the church that was so familiar to him from the previous day.

His mysterious lady was already there.

She was kneeling right beside the entrance amidst a crowd of worshippers. Ordynov squeezed a passage through the dense mass of beggars, ragged old women, sick people and cripples who were waiting for alms at the church door, and knelt down next to the unknown lady. His clothing touched hers, and he could hear the impetuous breathing that came from her mouth as it whispered an impassioned prayer. Her features were riven, as they had been earlier, by an emotion of boundless piety, and tears were again rolling down her hot cheeks and drying on them, as though washing away some terrible crime. The place in which they were both kneeling was completely dark, and only from time to time did the dim flame of an icon-lamp, flickering in the draught that was coming through a narrow open window, illumine her face with its restless light, a face every feature of which was engraved on the young man's memory, clouding his vision and tearing his heart with a dull, intolerable pain. But this torment had a frenzied intoxication of its own. At last he could bear it no longer; in the twinkling of an eye his whole body shivered and ached with a strangely pleasurable yearning, and with a sob he lowered his burning head on to the cold paving of the church floor. He felt and sensed nothing except the pain in his heart, which froze with sweet torment.

Whether this extreme sensitivity to impressions, this defenceless-ness and vulnerability had been nurtured by solitude; whether such impetuosity of heart had been prepared in the agonizing, airless and claustrophobic silence of long, sleepless nights, amidst the unconscious yearnings and impatient convulsions of the spirit, until that heart was ready at last either to break or find an outlet, and simply had no alternative but to pour itself out – as when on a sweltering, sultry day the sky suddenly turns black and a thunderstorm pours rain and fire on to the parched earth, hanging raindrops on the emerald boughs like pearls, trampling the grass and the fields, and beating down to the earth the tender chalices of the flowers, so that afterwards everything can revive once more in the sun's first rays, surging and rising towards it and majestically wafting to the sky its sweet, luxurious incense, rejoicing and

exulting in its new lease of life... Whatever the truth of the matter, Ordynov would not have been able to reflect on what was happening to him: he was now barely conscious...

He scarcely noticed when the service came to an end, and only came to himself as he was forcing his way through the dense crowd that had formed at the entrance, in pursuit of his mysterious lady. Occasionally he met her bright, astonished gaze. Held up for a moment by the emerging crowd, she turned towards him several times; it was evident that her astonishment was becoming greater and greater, and suddenly she flushed bright red, as though from the glow of a fire. At that moment the old man who had been with her the day before appeared from the throng and took her by the arm. Once again Ordynov encountered his jaundiced, mocking gaze, and a strange sense of hostility suddenly gripped his heart. At length in the darkness he lost them from view; then, with a superhuman effort, he lunged forward and got out of the church. But the cool evening air did not refresh him: his breathing was constricted, locked up inside him, and his heart had begun to beat slow and hard, as though it was trying to hammer its way out of his chest. At last he saw that he really had lost his mysterious acquaintances; they were nowhere to be seen, neither on the street nor in the side-lane. But in Ordynov's head a thought had formed, one of those strange, determined plans which, although they are invariably crazy, in such cases none the less almost always succeed and are brought to fruition; at eight o'clock the following morning he went up to the tenement building from the side of the lane and entered the small, narrow, muddy and dirty yard, which was like a cesspit inside the building itself. The yardkeeper, who was busy with some task or other there, stopped what he was doing, leaned his chin on the handle of his shovel, looked Ordynov over from head to foot, and asked him what he wanted.

The yardkeeper was a young fellow of about twenty-five with extremely old-looking features, small and wrinkled, a Tatar by origin.

'I'm looking for a room,' Ordynov replied, with impatience.

'Which one?' said the yardkeeper with an ironic smile. He was looking at Ordynov as though he knew exactly what the latter was up to.

‘I want to rent one from some tenants,’ Ordynov replied.

‘There are none on the other side of the building,’ the yardkeeper said, mysteriously.

‘And what about this side?’

‘There are none on this side, either.’ At that point the yardkeeper set to work with his shovel again.

‘But perhaps they’ll change their minds,’ said Ordynov, giving the yardkeeper a ten-copeck piece.

The Tatar looked at Ordynov, took the ten-copeck piece and then resumed working with his shovel. After a silence he said: ‘No, there are no rooms.’ But the young man was no longer listening; he was walking over the rotten, unsteady planks which had been laid over a puddle towards the only entrance from that yard to the outbuilding, a black, muddy, dirty entrance that looked as though it were drowning in the puddle. On the ground floor lived a poor coffin-maker. Navigating his way past the coffin-maker’s jolly workshop, Ordynov ascended by a slippery, semi-destroyed spiral staircase to the upper floor, groped his way in the darkness towards a heavy, clumsy door covered with rags of bast matting, found the latch and opened the door slightly. He was not mistaken. Before him stood the old man he knew, staring fixedly at him in extreme astonishment.

‘What do you want?’ the old man asked, using the familiar mode of address, abruptly and almost in a whisper.

‘Do you have a room to let?’ Ordynov enquired, almost having forgotten the entire purpose of his visit. Over the old man’s shoulder he could see his mysterious lady.

Silently the old man began to close the door, forcing Ordynov outside.

‘Yes, we have,’ the young woman said suddenly, in a kind and tender voice.

The old man let go of the door.

‘I need a place to live,’ Ordynov said, hurriedly entering the room and addressing the beautiful woman.

But when he glanced at his future landlord and landlady he

stopped in amazement, as though rooted to the spot; an extraordinary dumb show was taking place before his eyes. The old man was as pale as death, and looked as though he were about to faint. He was looking at the woman with a leaden, immobile, penetrating stare. She had also turned pale at first; but then the blood rushed to her face and her eyes seemed to glitter strangely. She led Ordynov into another small room.

The entire apartment consisted of one fairly large room, divided into three by two partitions; from the passage one went straight into a dark, narrow antechamber; directly ahead there was a door, evidently leading to the bedroom of the master and mistress, on the other side of the first partition. On the right, through the antechamber, one entered the room which was to let. It was small, narrow and cramped, battened against two low windows by means of the partition. Every inch of available space was piled and cluttered with the objects necessary for day-to-day living: it was a meagre, poky dwelling, but it was tolerably clean. The furniture consisted of a plain, white table, two plain chairs and a long, low cupboard which ran along both sides of the wall. A large, old-style icon with a gilded nimbus stood above a shelf in the corner, an icon-lamp burning before it. In this room, and also partly in the antechamber, there was an enormous, ungainly Russian stove. It was clear that it would be impossible for three people to live together in such a cramped space.

They began to discuss the amount of the rent, but the discussion was incoherent, and they could hardly understand each other. Ordynov, who was standing only two paces from her, could hear her heart beating; he could see that she was trembling all over with excitement and also, it seemed, with fear. Somehow at last they reached a settlement. The young man announced his intention of moving in at once, and he looked at his landlord. The old man was standing in the doorway; he still looked pale, but a quiet, almost reflective smile was stealing across his lips. As he met Ordynov's gaze he frowned once again.

'Do you have a passport?' he asked suddenly in a loud, abrupt voice, opening the door into the passage for him.

'Yes,' Ordynov replied, slightly puzzled.

'What's your name, and what sort of a fellow are you?'

‘My name is Vasily Ordynov – I belong to the gentry, but I’m not employed in the service, I have work of my own,’ he replied, imitating the old man’s tone of voice.

‘So do I,’ said the old man. □My name’s Ilya Murin, and I’m an artisan; is that good enough for you? Off you go...’

An hour later Ordynov had moved into his new room, much to his own surprise and to that of the German who, together with his devoted Tinchén, was already beginning to suspect that his lately acquired tenant had deceived him. Ordynov himself did not understand how it had all happened, nor did he want to...

II

His heart was beating so violently that a mist rose before his eyes and his head started to go round. Mechanically he occupied himself with finding a place for his few possessions in his new room; he untied the bundle which held various items of necessity, opened the chest containing his books and began to unpack them on the table; but he soon let this work slip from his hands. Moment by moment there shone in his mind’s eye the image of the woman, his encounter with whom had perturbed and shaken his entire existence, an image which tilled his heart with such irresistible, convulsive ecstasy; such had been the volume of happiness that had suddenly surged into his impoverished life that his mind grew dark and his spirit froze in anguish and confusion. He picked up his passport and took it to his landlord in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. But Murin opened the door only a little way, took the passport from him, said ‘Good, that’ll do,’ and shut himself up in his room once more. Ordynov was gripped by an unpleasant sensation. For some reason he found it distressing to look at the old man. There was something contemptuous and hostile in his gaze. But this unpleasant impression soon faded away. For three days now Ordynov had been living in a whirl of activity compared with the former doldrums of his existence; but he was unable to think clearly about any of the things that had happened to him, and was even afraid to do so. Everything in his existence had been disjointed and displaced; he had a hollow feeling that his whole life had been

split in half; he was possessed by one single yearning, one single expectation, and no other thought disturbed his mind.

In bewilderment he returned to his room. There, beside the stove in which a meal was being cooked, a little hunchbacked old woman was bustling about, so dirty and dressed in such loathsome rags that it grieved him to look at her. She seemed to be very angry, and from time to time kept muttering something toothlessly to herself under her breath. This was the landlord's servant. Ordynov made an attempt to talk to her, but she refused to say anything, evidently out of ill-temper. At last it was dinner-time; the old woman took the cabbage soup, the pirogi and the beef out of the oven and bore them to her master and mistress. She served Ordynov with some of the same. After the meal dead silence fell on the apartment.

Ordynov picked up a book and turned its pages for a long time, trying to find some meaning in what he had read several times before. In impatience he threw down the book and again set about putting his things in order; finally he took his cap, put on his overcoat and went out into the street. Walking haphazardly, without looking where he was going, he kept trying as far as possible to focus his mind, gather his scattered thoughts, and consider his position, if only briefly. But the effort only plunged his into suffering and torment. He was attacked by shivering and fever alternately, and at times his heart began to beat so wildly that he had to lean against the wall for support. 'No, it would be better to die,' he thought. 'Better to die,' he whispered through trembling, inflamed lips, not really conscious of what he was saying. He walked for a very long time; at last, realizing that he was soaked to the skin, and observing for the first time that it was pouring with rain, he returned to the apartment building. Not far from it he caught sight of the yardkeeper he had spoken to previously. It seemed to him that the Tatar spent some time staring fixedly at him with curiosity, and then continued on his way when he realized that he had been seen.

'Hello,' said Ordynov, catching him up. 'What's your name?'

'My name's a yardkeeper,' the man answered, baring his teeth.

'Have you been a yardkeeper her long?'

‘Yes, I have.’

‘Is my landlord really an artisan?’

‘If he says he is, then he is.’

‘What does he do?’

‘He’s a sick man; he lives, says his prayers – that’s about it.’

‘And what about his wife?’

‘What wife?’

‘The woman who lives with him.’

‘His wife... yes, if he says she’s his wife, then she is. Goodbye, master.’

The Tatar touched his cap and went off to his kennel-like lair.

Ordynov went into his room. The old woman, toothlessly muttering something to herself, opened the door for him, closed it again, setting it on the latch, and climbed back up on to the stove on which she spent her days. It was already getting dark. On his way to fetch some matches, Ordynov saw that the door to the room of the master and mistress was locked. He called the old woman who, raising herself on one elbow, was watching him keenly from the stove, apparently wondering why he was interested in the locked door; she silently threw him a box of matches. He returned to his room and again, for the hundredth time, set about the work of organizing his books and belongings. Gradually, however, becoming perplexed at what was happening to him, he sat down on the cupboard, and it seemed to him that he fell asleep. Occasionally he regained consciousness and then he would realize that it was not sleep that was overcoming him, but a kind of agonizing, morbid oblivion. He heard a door rattle and then open, and guessed that this was the master and mistress returning from vespers. At that point he suddenly had the idea that he had to go and see them for some reason. He got to his feet, and it seemed to him that he was already on his way through to them, but he missed his footing and tripped on a pile of firewood which the old woman had thrown down in the middle of the room. Then he completely lost consciousness; opening his eyes again after a very long interval, he noticed to his surprise that he was still lying on the cupboard, just as he had been, fully clothed, and that a woman’s face, wonderfully

beautiful and seemingly drenched with quiet, motherly tears, was leaning over him with tender concern. He felt a pillow being put under his head and a warm covering being placed over him, and someone's soft hand being laid against his hot brow. He wanted to thank whoever it was, he wanted to take this hand, place it against his parched lips, drench it in tears and kiss it, kiss it for all eternity. He had a desire to say a great many things, but he did not know what they were; at that moment he wanted to die. But his hands felt like lead and he could not move them; he seemed to have gone numb, and all he could hear was the blood thumping through his veins and seeming to lift him from his bed. Someone gave him water... At last he sank into oblivion.

He woke up at about eight the following morning. The sun was showering its rays in a golden burst through the mould-green windows of his room; a sense of comfort flowed through the sick man's limbs. He was peaceful and quiet, boundlessly happy. It seemed to him that someone had just been standing by the head of his bed. He had awoken, anxiously searching around him for that invisible being; he longed so much to embrace his friend and say, for the first time in his life: 'Good day to you, my sweet.'

'What a long sleep you've had!' a woman's soft voice said. Ordynov looked round, and the face of his beautiful landlady leaned over him with a smile as radiant and welcoming as the sun.

'You've been ill for such a long time,' she said. 'Enough now, get up; why deprive yourself of freedom? "Freedom is sweeter than bread, and brighter than the sun." Get up, my pigeon, get up.'

Ordynov seized her hand and pressed it tightly. He had a feeling that he was still dreaming.

'Wait, I've made you some tea; would you like some? Do have some; it'll do you good. I've been ill myself, and I know.'

'Yes, give me something to drink,' Ordynov said in a faint voice, and he got to his feet. He was still very weak. Cold shivers were running down his spine, all his limbs ached and seemed drained of energy. But there was a brightness in his heart, and the rays of the sun seemed to warm him with a radiant, majestic joy. He felt that a new, powerful, hidden life was beginning for him. His head was slightly dizzy.

‘You’re called Vasily, aren’t you?’ she said. ‘Perhaps I misheard, but I think that was the name the master addressed you by yesterday.’

‘Yes, my name’s Vasily. What’s yours?’ Ordynov asked, going close to her, but barely able to stand upright. He reeled slightly. She caught him by both hands, and laughed.

‘Katerina,’ she said, looking straight at him with her large, clear, blue eyes. They both stood holding each other by the hands.

‘Is there something you want to tell me?’ she said, at last.

‘I don’t know,’ Ordynov replied. His eyes had grown dim.

‘Just look at you. It’s all right, my pigeon, it’s all right; don’t fret, don’t grieve; sit down here at the table with your face to the sun; sit quietly, and don’t try to come after me,’ she added, observing that the young man made a movement as though to detain her. ‘I’ll be back in a moment; you’ll be able to see all you want of me.’ A minute later she brought in the tea, put it on the table and sat down opposite him.

‘Here you are, drink this,’ she said. ‘What’s the matter, have you a headache?’

‘No, it’s gone now,’ he said. ‘I don’t know, perhaps it hasn’t... I don’t want... I’ll be all right... I don’t know what’s wrong with me,’ he said, gasping for breath and finally reaching out for her hand. ‘Stay here, don’t leave me; give me your hand again... My eyes are dim; you are like the sun to them,’ he said; he spoke as if he were tearing the words out of his heart, thrilling with ecstasy as he uttered them. Sobs constricted his throat.

‘You poor man! You’ve obviously not been living with the right sort of people. You’re all alone; haven’t you any family?’

‘No, I’ve no one; I’m alone... but never mind, it doesn’t matter! It’s better now... I feel all right!’ Ordynov said, as though in delirium. The room seemed to be spinning round him.

‘I haven’t seen anyone for years, either. You know, you look at me as though...’ she said, after a short silence.

‘Yes?’

‘As though my eyes were warming you! You know, when you

like someone... I took you to my heart from the first words I heard you say. If you fall ill again I'll look after you. But don't fall ill. Once you're up and about again we shall live together like brother and sister. Would you like that? I mean, it's hard to find a sister if God hasn't given you one.'

'Who are you? Where are you from?' Ordynov said in a faint voice.

'I'm not from this part of the world... what difference does it make? You know, there's a story people tell about twelve brothers who live in a dark forest, and about a beautiful maiden who loses her way in it. She goes into their house and set it in order, putting all her love into her task. The brothers return and discover that a sister has spent the day in their home. They shout to her to come out, and she does. They call her "sister", let her do as she pleased, and she is their equal. Do you know that story?'

'Yes, I do,' Ordynov whispered.

'Life is good; do you enjoy life?'

'Oh, yes – to live one's life properly one must live long,' Ordynov replied.

'I don't know,' Katerina said, thoughtfully. 'I'd like to die, too. It's good to love life and to love good people, but... Look, you've gone as white as a sheet again!'

'Yes, my head's going round...'

'Wait, I'll bring you my bedding and another pillow; I'll make you up a bed right here. You'll fall asleep and dream about me; your illness will pass. Our old servantwoman is ill, too...'

As she began to make up the bed she continued to talk, looking over her shoulder at Ordynov with a smile from time to time.

'What a lot of books you have!' she said, as she moved the chest out of the way.

She went up to him, took him by the right arm, led him over to the bed, helped him under the blankets and placed the bedspread on top.

'They say that books spoil a man,' she said, shaking her head thoughtfully. 'Do you like reading?'

‘Yes,’ Ordynov replied, unsure whether he was asleep or not, and pressing Katerina’s hand all the harder, in order to convince himself that he was awake.

‘My master has a lot of books; you should see them! He says they’re religious books. He’s forever reading bits of them aloud to me. I’ll show you them later on; later on will you explain to me the meaning of all those things he reads to me?’

‘I will,’ Ordynov whispered, staring at her relentlessly.

‘Do you like praying?’ she asked, after a moment’s silence. ‘Do you know something? I’m afraid, I’m always afraid...’

She did not finish her sentence, apparently thinking about something. At length, Ordynov raised her hand to his lips.

‘Why are you kissing my hand?’ she said, and her cheeks went slightly red. ‘All right, here you are, kiss it,’ she went on, laughing and giving him both of her hands; then she pulled one of them free and placed it against his hot brow; after that, she began to straighten and smooth his hair. She was blushing redder and redder; finally she got down on the floor by his bedside and put her cheek against his; her warm, moist breathing rustled across his face... Suddenly Ordynov felt hot tears welling from her eyes and falling on to his cheeks like molten lead. He was growing weaker and weaker; by now he was unable to lift a finger. Just then there came a knocking at the door, and the crash of the bolt. Ordynov was still awake enough to hear the old man, his landlord, going into the room behind the partition. Then he sensed Katerina rising to her feet, without hurry or fuss, picking up her books and making the sign of the cross over him as she left; he closed his eyes. Suddenly a long, hot kiss burned on his inflamed lips; it was as though he had been stabbed in the heart with a knife. He gave a faint cry and lost consciousness...

After that a strange life began for him.

At times, in moments of hazy wakefulness, the thought flickered through his mind that he had been condemned to live in a sort of long and endless dream, full of strange, fruitless anxieties, struggles and sufferings. With horror he tried to resist the doom-laden sense of fatalism that oppressed him; then, in a moment of the most intense and desperate struggle some unknown force struck him

down once more and he felt himself clearly losing consciousness again, as again the impenetrable, bottomless gloom opened up before him and he fell into it with a howl of anguish and despair. At times he experienced moments of unbearable, annihilating happiness, when his vital energies intensified convulsively throughout his whole metabolism, his past stood out clearly, the bright moment of the here and now resounded with majesty and revelry, and he had a waking dream of a mysterious, unknowable future; when an inexpressible hope fell on his soul like a reviving dew; when he wanted to scream with ecstasy; when he felt that his flesh was powerless under such a weight of impressions, that the very thread of existence itself was in danger of snapping, and when at the same time he congratulated his life on its renewal and resurrection. At times he would again fall into a hypnotic state, and then everything that had happened to him during the recent days would repeat itself, passing through his mind in an obscure, restless swarm; but the vision would appear to him in a strange, enigmatic form. At times the sick man would forget what had happened to him, and he would be struck with surprise that he was not in his old room, not in the house of his former landlady. He would wonder why the old woman did not come, as she had always done at the late hour of twilight, to the dying stove, which at intervals suffused every dark corner of the room with a faint, shimmering rathance, and why she did not, as she usually did while waiting for the fire to go out, warm her trembling, bony hands at the fading embers, constantly chattering and whispering to herself, and occasionally looking in bewilderment at him, her strange lodger, whom she believed to have gone insane from sitting so long over his books. At other times he would remember that he had moved into another room; but how this had come about, what it was that had happened to him and why he had had to move – this he could not fathom, even though his spirit thrilled with a ceaseless, irrepressible striving... And what was it that called him and tormented him, and why? Who had ignited this unendurable flame, a flame which was choking and devouring his very life-blood? Again he did not know and could not remember. Often he would clutch avidly at some shadow, hear the rustle of light footsteps close to his bed and the whisper, sweet as music, of someone's kind, tender words; someone's moist, impetuous breathing would float across his face, and his entire being would be riven with love; someone's scalding

tears would burn his inflamed cheeks, and suddenly someone's kiss, long and tender, would fasten itself on his lips; then his life would pine away in inextinguishable torment; it would seem as though all of creation, all the world around him had stopped, died for whole aeons, as though the long night of the millennium had enshrouded everything...

Then there would seem to begin for him once again the soft, tranquil years of his early childhood with their luminous joy, their inextinguishable happiness, their first sweet wonder at life, their hosts of radiant spirits which flew out from every flower he plucked, which played with him on the succulent green meadow in front of the little house surrounded with acacia, which smiled to him from the crystal waters of the vast lake by which he sat for hours on end, listening to wave lapping upon wave, and which rustled about him with their wings, lovingly strewing his little cradle-cot with bright, rainbow-coloured dreams, as his mother leaned over him, making the sign of the cross over him, kissing him and lulling him to sleep with a quiet lullaby in the long, peaceful nights. But then, suddenly, a being had started to appear which had disturbed him with an unchildlike horror, and had infused his life with the first, slow poison of bitterness and tears; he sensed obscurely that a mysterious old man held all his future years in his power and, trembling, he was unable to take his eyes off him. The evil old man followed him everywhere. The old man would look out from behind every bush in the shrubbery, deceitfully nodding his head, laughing, and teasing him; he would come to life in every one of the boy's dolls, making faces and chortling with laughter in his hands, like an evil, ugly gnome; he would incite every one of the boy's heartless schoolfellows against him or, as he sat with those urchins on the schoolroom bench, pull yet more faces, and look out from behind every letter in his grammar-book. Later, as he slept, the evil old man would sit by the head of his bed... He chased away the swarms of bright spirits that rustled about his cradle-cot with their gold and sapphire wings, took his poor mother from him for ever and began at nights to whisper to him a long, strange story, unintelligible to the heart of a child, but tormenting and arousing him with horror and unchildlike passion. But the evil old man would not listen to his pleas and sobs, and would continue to talk to him until he sank into numbness and oblivion. Then the urchin suddenly woke up a man; whole years had passed over him unseen

and unheeded. He suddenly realized his true position, suddenly began to understand that he was alone and estranged from the whole world, alone in an alien place among mysterious, suspicious people, among enemies, who kept huddling together and whispering in the corners of his dark room, nodding to the old woman who sat squatting on her heels by the fire as she warmed her decrepit old hands and pointed to him. He fell into confusion, into alarm; he kept wanting to know who these people were, why they were here, why he was in this room, and guessed that he had strayed into some dark den of villains, having been lured there by some powerful but inscrutable force, and having neglected to perceive who and what manner of people were those who lodged here, and who his landlords were. Suspicion began to gnaw at him – and suddenly in the darkness of the night the long, whispered story began once more, this time quietly, barely audibly, through the mouth of an old woman who was telling it to herself, sadly shaking her white and grey head in front of the dying fire. But – once again he was attacked by a sense of horror; the story came to life before him in forms and faces. He saw everything, beginning with the vague dreams of his childhood, and progressing to every thought and dream he had ever had, all that he had experienced in his life, that he had read in books, things he had long ago forgotten about – all of this came to life, acquired flesh and structure, arose before him in colossal forms and images, moving and swarming about him; he saw magic, luxuriant gardens unfolding before him, whole cities being created and destroyed in his sight, whole cemeteries giving up to him their dead, * who began to live their lives all over again, whole peoples and races coming into being and dying away, and finally, around his sickbed, every one of his thoughts, every incorporeal daydream he had ever had being embodied almost at the moment of its conception; at last he saw himself thinking not in disembodied ideas, but in whole worlds, whole universes, saw himself floating along like a grain of dust in this strange, infinite world from which there was no escape, and all this life, in its rebellious independence, crushing him, weighing him down and pursuing him with its eternal, infinite irony; he sensed himself dying, being reduced to dust and ashes, without resurrection, to the end of time; he wanted to run away, but there was no refuge for him in the entire universe. At last, in a fit of despair, straining every nerve in his body, he uttered a shriek and woke up.

He woke up drenched in cold, icy sweat. Dead silence reigned all about him; it was deepest night. Yet still he fancied that somewhere his wonderful story was still continuing, that someone's hoarse voice was telling a long narrative about a subject that seemed familiar to him. He heard the voice talking about dark forests, about fearless bandits, about some daring young blood who was possibly even Stenka Razin* himself, about merry, drunken barge-haulers, about a certain beautiful maiden, and about Old Mother Volga. Was it not a fantasy? Could he really hear it? For a whole hour he lay with his eyes open, not moving a limb, in a state of agonized numbness. At last he got cautiously to his feet and with joy felt some strength in his body – it has not all been exhausted by his cruel illness. His delirium had passed, and now reality was at hand. He observed that he was still dressed as he had been at the time of his conversation with Katerina and that, consequently, only a short time could have passed since the morning when she had left him. The fire of resolve coursed through his veins. Mechanically he groped with his hands towards a large nail which had for some reason been hammered into the top of the partition against which his bed had been made up, seized hold of it and, letting it take all his weight, somehow managed to pull himself up to the chink through which a barely perceptible glow of light entered his room. He put an eye to the opening and began to look, hardly able to breathe from excitement.

In one corner of the landlord's room stood a bed. In front of the bed there was a table, covered with a rug and piled with books of a large, old-fashioned format, cased in bindings that resembled those of religious books. In this same corner there was an icon which was just as old as the one in his room; a lamp was burning in front of it. On the bed lay the old man, Murin; he was sick, emaciated with suffering and as white as a sheet, and he was covered with a bedspread made of fur. An open book lay on his knees. On a bench beside the bed lay Katerina; she had her arm around the old man, and was leaning her head on his shoulder. She was looking at him with attentive, childishly wondering eyes, and also, it seemed, with insatiable curiosity, dying with expectation as she listened to what Murin was telling her. At times the voice of the narrator was raised, and his pale features were animated; he would knit his eyebrows, his eyes would begin to glitter, and Katerina seemed to turn pale with fear and agitation. Then something akin to a smile would

appear on the face of the old man, and Katerina would quietly begin to laugh. Occasionally tears burned in her eyes; then the old man would tenderly stroke her head, as if she were a child, and she would hug him even more tightly with her bare arm that flashed white as snow, and press herself even more lovingly against him.

At times, as he watched all this, Ordynov thought he was still dreaming, indeed he was convinced of it; but the blood was rushing to his head and the veins were pounding in his temples, intensely and painfully. He let go of the nail, got down from his bed and, staggering and groping his way like a lunatic, not really understanding his own motive, which had flared up like a regular fire in his blood, he approached the door of his landlord's bedroom and pushed at it violently; the rusty bolt came away instantly, and with an ignominious bang he suddenly found himself in the midst of the room. He saw Katerina flutter and tremble all over, saw the old man's eyes begin to glitter from under his heavily knit eyebrows as a sudden fury distorted his features. He saw the old man quickly, not taking his eyes off him, reach with a wandering hand for the musket that hung on the wall; then he saw a flash come from the muzzle of the gun which was aimed, by an uncertain and rage-trembling hand, directly at him... A shot rang out, followed by a wild, almost inhuman shriek, and when the smoke had cleared a strange spectacle met Ordynov's eyes. Trembling all over, he bent down over the old man. Murin lay on the floor; he was being racked by convulsions, his face was distorted with agony, and foam was visible on his twisted lips. Ordynov realized that the unhappy man was suffering an acute fit of epilepsy. Together with Katerina, he rushed to help him...

III

The whole night went by in a state of uneasiness and anxiety. Early the next morning Ordynov went out, in spite of his weakness and the fever which had still not left him. In the yard he encountered the yardkeeper again. On his occasion the Tatar raised his cap slightly to him while he was still at a distance, and looked at him with curiosity. Then, as though recollecting himself, he set to work

with his broom, glancing surreptitiously at the slowly approaching Ordynov.

‘Well, did you hear anything last night?’

‘Yes, I did.’

‘Who is that man? What sort of fellow is he?’

‘You’re the one who’s renting a place there, so you ought to know. It’s not my business.’

‘Will you or will you not tell me?’ Ordynov shouted, beside himself in a fit of morbid irritation.

‘What’s it got to do with me? You’re the one who’s to blame – you frightened the tenants. There’s a coffin-maker lives on the first floor; he’s deaf but he heard it all, and so did his old woman, and she’s deaf, too. They heard it on the other side of the building, even though it’s miles away. I’m going to see the inspector of police...’

‘I’m going to see him myself,’ Ordynov replied, and set off towards the gate.

‘As you want; you’re the one who’s renting the room... Master, master, wait!’

Ordynov looked round; out of politeness the yardkeeper touched his cap.

‘Well?’

‘If you go to the police, I’ll go to the owner.’

‘What?’

‘You’d do better to move.’

‘You’re stupid,’ Ordynov said, and again started to move away.

‘Master, master, wait!’

Again the yardkeeper touched his cap, this time baring his teeth in a grin.

‘Listen, master, have a heart – why cause a poor man a lot of trouble? It’s a sin. God won’t like it, do you hear?’

‘You listen, too: here, take this. Well, what sort of man is he, then?’

‘What sort of man?’

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t need to take money to tell you that.’

At this point the yardkeeper picked up his broom and took a couple of swipes with it; then he stood still, giving Ordynov an attentive, important stare.

‘You’re a decent gent. If you don’t want to live with good folk, it’s up to you. That’s what I think.’

Here the Tatar gave him an even more meaningful look, and again busied himself with his broom as though he were annoyed about something. Finally, with an air of having completed some task, he went up to Ordynov mysteriously and, making an especially meaning-laden gesture, said:

‘I’ll tell you what sort of man he is.’

‘Yes? Tell me!’

‘He’s lost his mind.’

‘What?’

‘It flew away. Yes, flew away,’ he repeated, in an even more mysterious tone of voice. ‘He’s ill. He had a barge, a big one, and several others besides, he used to navigate the Volga – I’m from the Volga myself, you know; he had a factory, too, but it burned down, and he lost his rocker.’

‘You mean he’s insane?’

‘Oh – no!’ the Tatar replied. ‘I wouldn’t say that. He’s a clever man. He knows everything, he’s read a lot of books; he’s read and read and read, and he’s told other people the truth. What he does is, when somebody comes and gives him two rubles, forty rubles, the more the better, he looks in one of his books, finds the right place and tells the person the truth. But you have to put your cash on the table right away – otherwise it’s no deal!’

Here the Tatar, entering into Murin’s interests with an excess of imaginative zeal, actually laughed out loud.

‘What is it that he does? Does he put spells on people, tell their fortunes?’

‘Hm...’ the yardkeeper mumbled, with a quick shake of his head. ‘He tells the truth. He prays – he does a lot of praying. And sometimes it comes upon him, just like that.’

Here the Tatar made his meaningful gesture once more. Just then someone called to the yardkeeper from the yard at the other side of the house, and then a little, stooping, grey-haired man in a sheepskin coat appeared. As he walked he groaned and stumbled, looking at the ground and whispering something to himself. One might have supposed that he had lost his wits from senility.

‘The owner, the owner!’ the yardkeeper whispered, hurriedly, nodding quickly to Ordynov and, tearing off his cap, he set off at a run towards the old man, whose face Ordynov thought was somehow familiar; at least, he had encountered it somewhere only a very short time ago. But reasoning that there was nothing so very strange about that, he walked out of the yard. The yardkeeper seemed to him a villain and upstart of the first order. ‘That loafer was almost bargaining with me!’ he thought. ‘Lord knows what he was up to.’

When he said this, he was already out on the street.

Little by little, other thoughts began to preoccupy him. They were mostly of a cheerless sort: the day was grey and cold, with flurries of snow. The young man felt his limbs begin to ache with a feverish shiver again. Suddenly a familiar voice wished him good morning in an unpleasantly sweet, ringing tenor.

‘Yaroslav Ilyich!’ said Ordynov.

Before him stood a cheerful, red-cheeked man who looked about thirty; he was short of stature, with grey, oily eyes and a little smile on his face, and he was dressed... in the way Yaroslav Ilyich always dressed. He extended his hand in a most pleasant manner. Ordynov had made Yaroslav Ilyich’s acquaintance exactly a year before quite by chance, practically in the street. They had formed their acquaintanceship very easily, partly because of its element of chance, and partly because of Yaroslav Ilyich’s unusual propensity for everywhere seeking out good, decent people, who were above all educated and who were worthy, at least so far as talent and polite behaviour were concerned, of belonging to the highest society. Although Yaroslav Ilyich had an extremely sweet tenor voice, even

in conversation with his most intimate friends there was in its tone something extraordinarily radiant, powerful and commanding, something that would countenance no procrastination and was probably the result of habit.

‘How is it possible?’ Yaroslav Ilyich exclaimed, with an expression of the most sincere, enthusiastic delight.

‘I live here.’

‘Have you lived here long?’ Yaroslav Ilyich enquired, his voice steadily rising in pitch. ‘I didn’t know! Why, we’re neighbours! I’m back at the local station* here now – got back from Ryazan a month ago. I’ve found you out, my old and trusted friend!’ And Yaroslav Ilyich burst into the most good-natured laughter.

‘Sergeyev!’ he cried in a sudden burst of inspiration. ‘Wait for me at Tarasov’s, and don’t let them lay a finger on those sacks until I get there. And winkle out the yardkeeper at Olsufyev’s; tell him to report to the office immediately. I’ll be there in an hour...’

Having quickly issued these instructions to the person concerned, the tactful Yaroslav Ilyich took Ordynov by the arm and led him off to the nearest pub.

‘I shall not rest easy in my mind until I’ve exchanged a few words alone with you after such a long time. Well, how are your studies?’ he went on, lowering his voice mysteriously and almost reverently. ‘Still at your book learning?’

‘Yes, I’m still working on my project,’ replied Ordynov, to whom a bright idea had just occurred.

‘Nobly done, Vasily Mikhailovich, nobly done!’ At this point Yaroslav Ilyich shook Ordynov’s hand firmly. ‘You will be the pride of our coterie. May the Lord grant you a prosperous passage on your chosen career... Goodness! How glad I am that I met you! How many times I have remembered you, how many times I have said: “Where is he, our good, magnanimous, sharp-witted Vasily Mikhailovich?”’

They engaged the snuggery. Yaroslav Ilyich ordered snacks, asked for vodka to be served and looked at Ordynov with feeling.

‘I’ve read a lot since I last saw you,’ he began in a timid, slightly ingratiating tone of voice. ‘I’ve read the whole of Pushkin...’

Ordynov gave him a distracted look.

‘His depiction of human passion is remarkable, sir. But I should like to begin by expressing my gratitude to you. You have done so much for me by nobly instilling me with a sense of justice...’

‘Oh, please!’

‘No, sir, I insist. I always like to render justice where justice is due, and am proud that this feeling at least has not died in me.’

‘Please, you are not being fair to yourself, and to be honest, I...’

‘No, I am being perfectly fair,’ Yaroslav Ilyich retorted with unusual vehemence. ‘What am I compared to you? Eh?’

‘Oh, for heaven’s sake!’

‘No, sir...’

There followed an interval of silence.

‘Following your advice, I have broken off many vulgar friendships and have to some extent modified the vulgarity of my habits,’ Yaroslav Ilyich began again in his slightly timid, ingratiating voice. ‘In the time I have free from work I mostly stay at home; in the evenings I read an improving book, and... I have but one desire, Vasily Mikhailovich – to do what I can to help the fatherland...’

‘I have always considered you a most honourable man, Yaroslav Ilyich.’

‘You unfailingly bring balm to my soul... my noble young man...’ said Yaroslav Ilyich.

And he warmly shook Ordynov’s hand.

‘You aren’t drinking?’ he observed, his excitement waning somewhat.

‘I can’t; I’m ill.’

‘Ill? You don’t say. Have you been ill long? What kind of illness is it? If you like, I’ll have a word... What sort of medico’s looking after you? If you like, I’ll have a word with our local doctor. I’ll go and see him myself, in person. He’s a very skilful man.’

Yaroslav Ilyich was already reaching for his hat.

‘Thank you, but I haven’t got a doctor, and I don’t want one – I don’t care for them.’

‘What do you say? Is it possible? But this is a most skilful, educated man,’ Yaroslav Ilyich went on, entreatingly. ‘The otherday – let me tell you about this, dear Vasily Mikhailovich – the other day a poor locksmith went to see him: “I’ve cut my hand on one of my tools,” he said; “please do something to make it better...” Semyon Pafnutych, the doctor, seeing that the poor fellow was in danger of contracting gangrene, took the precautionary measure of amputating the infected member. I was there when he did it. But he did it in such a manner, so nob... I mean, so exquisitely, that I must confess that had it not been for one’s compassion for suffering humanity, it would have been a pleasure to observe, simply out of curiosity. But where did you catch this illness, and how?’

‘Moving from one apartment into another... I’ve only just got up.’

‘But you’re still very unwell, and you ought not to be out. So you’re not living where you used to? What prompted you to move?’

‘My landlady had to leave St Petersburg.’

‘Domma Sawishna? Really?... A good-hearted, truly noble old lady! Do you know, I used to have an almost filial respect for her. Some of the exalted quality of our forefathers’ days used to shine forth from that life which had almost run its course; as one looked at her, one seemed to see before one the living embodiment of our venerable, majestic past... I mean... there was something so poetic about her!’ Yaroslav Ilyich concluded, utterly embarrassed and blushing to his ears.

‘Yes, she was a good woman.’

‘But allow me to ask where you have moved to now.’

‘Not far from here; I’ve a room in Koshmarov’s Tenements.’*

‘I know him. A majestic old man! I may even make so bold as to say that I’m almost a good friend of his. A noble old man!’

Yaroslav Ilyich’s mouth was almost trembling from the joy of his tender emotion. He ordered another glass of vodka and a pipe.

‘Do you rent the room direct?’

‘No, from a tenant.’

‘Who is that? Perhaps I know him, too.’

‘An artisan named Murin; he’s an old, tall fellow...’

‘Murin, Murin. Yes, I know: he lives at the back of the building, on the floor above the coffin-maker, doesn’t he?’

‘Yes, yes, right at the back of the building.’

‘Hm... are you happy living there?’

‘I’ve only just moved in.’

‘Hm... I only meant to say that, hm... so you haven’t noticed anything unusual?’

‘Well...’

‘Oh, I’m sure you’ll be all right at his place if you’re satisfied with your accommodation... I didn’t mean to imply anything like that, wasn’t trying to warn you; but knowing the sort of chap you are... What did you think of that old artisan?’

‘Apparently he’s a very sick man.’

‘Yes, he suffers a great deal... But didn’t you notice anything? Did you speak to him?’

‘Very little; he’s so irritable and withdrawn...’

‘Hm...’ Yaroslav Ilyich thought for a moment.

‘An unhappy man!’ he said, after this pause.

‘The old fellow, you mean?’

‘Yes, he’s unhappy, yet at the same time he’s an almost improbably strange and interesting character. Anyway, if you’re all right with him... Forgive me for bringing the subject up, but I was just curious, that’s all...’

‘I must say that you’ve made me curious, too... I’d very much like to know who he is. After all, I’m living in his apartment...’

‘Listen, I’ll tell you something: they say that this man was once very rich. As I expect you’ve heard, he used to be in business. Through various unhappy circumstances, he became poor; several of his barges sank in a storm with all their loads. His factory, which

had apparently been entrusted to the care of a close and beloved relative, also met with an unhappy fate and burnt down – the relative was killed in the blaze. I think you will agree it was a terrible loss! They say that after that, Murin fell into a terrible depression; people were worried that he might lose his reason, and indeed in a quarrel with another merchant who also owned barges that plied the Volga, he suddenly showed himself in such a strange and unexpected light that people were compelled to regard the entire incident as a result of his having gone temporarily and violently insane, which I am inclined to believe. I have heard some detailed accounts of his strange behaviour; and there finally occurred such an event so extremely strange and, in a manner of speaking, fateful, that it could only be explained in terms of the malevolent influence of angry fortune.’

‘What event was that?’ Ordynov asked.

‘They say that in a morbid fit of insanity he made an attempt on the life of a certain young merchant for whom he had previously had the most friendly feelings. So shocked was he when he recovered from the fit that he tried to take his own life: that’s the story they tell, at least. I’m not exactly sure what happened to him after that, but it is known that he spent several years doing penance... But what is wrong, Vasily Mikhailovich, is my simple tale wearying you?’

‘Oh, no, anything but... You say he did penance; but he’s not alone.’

‘I don’t know. They say he was alone. At least, no one else was implicated in the case. But then, I never heard what happened later; all I know is that...’

‘Yes?’

‘All I know is that – well, I don’t really have anything to add to what I’ve told you... all I want to say is that if you find anything unusual and out of the ordinary run of things in him, it’s simply the consequence of the disasters that have befallen him, one after the other...’

‘Yes, he’s such a pious old fish, so sanctimonious.’

‘Oh, I don’t know, Vasily Mikhailovich; he has suffered so much; I think he is pure in heart.’

‘But I mean, he’s not mad now; he’s sane.’

‘Oh, yes, yes; that I can guarantee you, I’d even be prepared to swear an oath on it: he’s in full possession of all his mental faculties. It’s just that he’s, as you so rightly hinted in passing, extremely pious and eccentric. He’s actually a very sensible man. He talks boldly, alertly, and very shrewdly. The traces of his stormy past are still visible in his features. He’s an inquisitive man, and extremely well-read.’

‘He only seems to read religious books.’

‘Yes, he’s a mystic’.

‘What?’

‘He’s a mystic. But that’s a secret which I tell you in confidence. I can also tell you, again confidentially, that at one time he was placed under strict surveillance. That man had a terrible influence on those who sought his company.’

‘What sort of influence?’

‘You wouldn’t believe it; listen, and I’ll tell you. In those days he lived in another part of town, not this one; Aleksandr Ignatich, a distinguished citizen, a pillar of society who commanded universal respect, went to see him with some lieutenant or other – they were both simply curious. They arrived at his house, were ushered inside, and then this strange man began to peer into their faces. He usually peered into people’s faces when he had agreed to be of service to them; otherwise he would send them away, in a thoroughly impolite manner, it’s said. “What do you want, gentlemen?” he asked. “Oh,” replied Aleksandr Ignatich: “your gift ought to be able to tell you that without our needing to.” “Come into the other room with me,” he said, determining which one of them it was who had come to ask him for something without having to enquire. Aleksandr Ignatich didn’t say what happened to the man after that, but he came out as white as a sheet. The same thing happened in the case of a certain aristocratic lady from the highest society: she also came out from her interview with him as white as a sheet, in floods of tears and amazed by his predictions and eloquent speech.’

‘Strange. But he doesn’t ply that trade now?’

‘He’s been categorically forbidden to. There were some

extraordinary cases. A certain young cornet, the flowering hope of a highborn family, smiled ironically at the sight of him. "What are you laughing at?" the old man said, flying into a rage. "In three days' time you'll be like this!" – and he crossed his arms over his chest to denote a corpse.'

'Well?'

'I don't dare to believe it, but they say that his prediction was fulfilled. He possesses a gift. Vasily Mikhailovich... You smile at my artless tale. I know that you have far outstripped me in education; but I trust him: he is not a charlatan. Pushkin himself mentions something similar in his writings.'*

'Hm. I have no wish to contradict you. I believe you said that he doesn't live alone.'

'I don't know... I think his daughter lives with him.'

'His daughter?'

'Yes, or she may be his wife; at any rate, I know he has some woman living with him. I've seen her in passing, but never paid much attention to her.'

'Hm. Strange...'

The young man lapsed into reflection, and Yaroslav Ilyich into tender contemplation. He was pleasantly excited both at seeing his old friend and at having been able to tell him something interesting. He sat without taking his eyes off Vasily Mikhailovich, puffing at his pipe; suddenly, however, he leapt to his feet and began to get flustered.

'A whole hour has passed – I've forgotten the time! Dear Vasily Mikhailovich, once again I thank fortune for having brought us together, but now I must leave you. Will you permit me to visit you in your learned abode?'

'By all means – I shall be very glad to see you. I shall come and visit you, too, when time allows.'

'Dare I believe the wonderful news? You will do me a great favour, a truly great favour! You cannot imagine the joy with which you have inspired me!'

They left the inn. Sergeyev was already racing towards them in

order to hurriedly report to Yaroslav Ilyich that Vilyam Yemelyanovich was driving by. Sure enough, a smart pair of greys drawing a smart drozhky came into view. Especially stylish was the unusual addition of a trace-horse. Yaroslav Ilyich squeezed the hand of his best friend in a vice-like grip, touched his hat and set off to meet the approaching drozhky. On the way he turned round a couple of times and nodded to Ordynov in a valedictory manner.

Ordynov felt such weariness, such exhaustion in all his limbs that he was hardly able to drag his legs along. Somehow he managed to reach home. At the gate he was again met by the yardkeeper, who had observed closely the whole of his parting with Yaroslav Ilyich, and made him a beckoning sign while he was still some distance away. But the young man paid no attention, and simply walked past. At the door of his lodgings he collided fairly and squarely with a small grey-haired individual who was coming out from Murin's room, his eyes lowered.

'Lord, forgive me my transgressions,' the man whispered, jumping to one side with the resilience of a bottle-cork.

'I didn't hurt you, did I?'

'No, sir, but I thank you most humbly for your concern... Oh, Lord, Lord!'

Moaning and groaning, mumbling some edifying words to himself, the quiet little man carefully descended the staircase. This was the owner of the building, who had so frightened the yardkeeper. It was only now that Ordynov remembered he had first seen him here, at Murin's apartment, when he had been moving into his new room.

He felt tense and shaken; he knew that his imagination and sensibility had been strained to breaking-point, and so he decided not to trust his own impressions. Little by little he sank into a kind of lethargy. His chest was weighed down by a heavy, oppressive sensation. His heart ached as though it were covered in ulcers, and his soul was full of voiceless, inexhaustible tears.

He fell back on the bed she had made up for him and began to listen again. He could hear two sets of breathing: one was heavy, painful and intermittent, the other quiet but uneven, and also somehow filled with emotion, as though a heart were beating there

with the same striving, the same passion. From time to time he could hear the sounds of her dress, the light rustle of her soft, quiet footsteps, and even this rustle of her feet echoed in his heart with a dull, but tormentingly sweet pain. At length he thought he heard sobs, a passionate sigh and then the sound of her praying again. He knew she was kneeling before the icon, wringing her hands in a frenzied paroxysm of despair... Who was she? For whom was she interceding? By what hopeless passion was her heart disturbed? Why did it ache and grieve and overflow with such hot and hopeless tears?

He began to remember her words. Everything she had said to him still sang in his ears like music, and his heart lovingly echoed each memory of her, each devoutly repeated word she had uttered with a dull, heavy throb... For a second it flashed through his mind that he had dreamt it all. But at that same moment his entire being ached with a sinking sense of anguish as the memory of her hot breath, her words, her kiss burned itself anew into his brain. He closed his eyes and lost consciousness. Somewhere a clock was striking; it was getting late; dusk was falling.

It suddenly seemed to him that she was leaning over him again, looking with her wonderfully clear eyes, moist with the glittering tears of a serene, radiant joy, calm and clear as the infinite turquoise cupola of the heavens on a hot midday, into his own. With such solemn calm did her features shine, with such a promise of infinite bliss did her smile gleam, with such sympathy, with such childlike devotion did she lean her head on his shoulder that a moan of joy broke from his overwhelmed inner self. She was trying to tell him something; she was tenderly confiding something to him. Again a heart-piercing music seemed to strike his ears. He greedily sucked in the air which had been rendered warm and electric by her close breathing. In anguish he stretched out his arms, sighed, opened his eyes... She was standing in front of him, bending down towards his face, pale as from sudden fright, in tears, trembling all over with agitation. She was telling him something, begging him for something, wringing her hands, her arms half-exposed. He entwined her in his embrace, and she quivered against his breast...

PART TWO

I

‘What are you doing? What’s the matter with you?’ said Ordynov, who was now wide awake, but still held her in a close, passionate embrace. ‘What’s the matter, Katerina? What’s wrong, my love?’

She was sobbing quietly, her eyes lowered as she hid her flushed face against his chest. It was a long time before she could bring herself to speak; she was trembling all over as though in fright.

‘I don’t know, I don’t know’ she said at last in a voice that was barely audible, gasping for breath and almost unable to get the words out. ‘I can’t remember how I got into your room...’ At that point she pressed herself even closer to him, with even greater yearning, and kissed his shoulder, his arms, his chest in an unstoppable, convulsive rush of feeling; finally, as though in despair, she covered her face with her hands, fell to her knees and buried her head in his legs. And when Ordynov, in unspeakable anguish, impatiently made her get up and sat her down beside him, her face burned with a veritable conflagration of shame, her eyes wept for forgiveness and the smile that forced itself to her lips was scarcely able to suppress the violence of this new emotion. Now she again seemed frightened of something; she pushed him away with one arm, hardly looked at him, and replied to his rapid questions fearfully and in a whisper, her head lowered.

‘I think you must have had a nightmare,’ Ordynov said. ‘Perhaps you had some kind of hallucination... is that it? Perhaps *he* frightened you... He’s in delirium and unconscious... Perhaps he said something you ought not to have heard... Was it something you heard? Was it?’

‘No, I haven’t been asleep,’ Katerina replied, suppressing her agitation only with an effort. ‘I couldn’t get to sleep. *He* kept silent all the time, and only called me once. I went over to him, spoke his

name, talked to him; I grew afraid; he did not wake up, and did not seem to hear me. He is gravely ill; may the Lord help him! After that anguish began to bite deeply into my heart, bitter anguish! I prayed and prayed, and then this came over me.'

'Enough of this, Katerina, enough, my life, enough! All that happened was that something frightened you yesterday...'

'No, nothing frightened me yesterday!...

'Have you ever experienced anything like this before?'

'Yes, I have.' And she started to tremble again, pressing herself close against him like a child. 'Look,' she said, interrupting her sobs, 'I didn't come to you without reason. No, not without reason. I was miserable on my own,' she said, pressing his hands in gratitude. 'Enough, enough of shedding tears over someone else's grief! Save them for the black day when you yourself, lonely man, are miserable and you have no one to whom you can turn... Listen, have you ever had a sweetheart?'

'No... until you, I haven't known a single...

'Until me... Are you calling me your sweetheart?'

She suddenly gave him a look that might have been one of surprise, seemed to be about to say something, but then grew quiet and lowered her gaze. Little by little her face was once more reddened by a suddenly spreading blush; her eyes shone more brightly through the forgotten tears that had not yet cooled on her eyelashes, and it was apparent that some question was stirring on her lips. With modest playfulness she looked at him once or twice and then suddenly lowered her eyes again. 'No, I'm not going to be your first sweetheart,' she said. 'No, no,' she repeated, shaking her head reflectively, as a smile once more quietly stole across her features. 'No, my dear,' she said, laughing: 'I'm not going to be your sweetheart.'

Here she glanced in his direction; but so much melancholy was suddenly written in her face, each one of her features was abruptly touched by so much desperate sadness, so unexpectedly did her despair seethe up from inside her, from within her heart, that a strange, morbid sense of compassion for her enigmatic suffering gripped Ordynov's spirit, and he looked at her in unspeakable torment.

‘Listen to what I shall tell you,’ she said in a voice that pierced his heart, pressing his hands in hers as she struggled to keep back her sobs. ‘Listen to me well, listen, my joy! Chasten your heart, and do not love me as you do now. You will feel better, your heart will be lighter and more joyful, you will both save yourself from a merciless enemy and gain a sister who cares for you. I will come and see you whenever you like, I will caress you and take no shame upon myself for having befriended you. After all, I was with you for two days, when you lay in that cruel illness! Recognize your sister! Not for nothing have we entered into this close friendship, not for nothing have I prayed in tears to the Holy Virgin for you! You will not find another like me! Though you travel the world over, though you come to know the earth in its entirety, you will not find another such love, if it is love your heart asks for. I will love you passionately, I will love you always as I do now, and I will love you because your soul is pure, light, transparent; because as soon as I first set eyes on you I knew that you were the guest of my household, the desired guest who had not thrust himself upon us unbidden; I will love you because when you look at me your eyes express love and tell of your heart, and when they speak I at once know about everything that is in you. I know, and so I want to give you my life for your love, want to give you my precious freedom, because it is sweet to be the slave of the one whose heart I have found... but my life is not my own, it belongs to another, and my freedom is constrained! Take me as a sister, and be a brother to me – take me to your heart when anguish and cruel infirmity once more assail me; only do it so that I need not be ashamed to come to you and sit with you, as now, through the long night. Do you hear me? Have you opened your heart to me? Has your reason accepted what I have said to you?...’ She tried to say something else, looked at him, put her hand on his shoulder and at last fell helplessly into his arms. Her voice sank away in convulsive, passionate sobbing, her bosom heaved deeply, and her face flushed red as a sunset.

‘My life!’ whispered Ordynov, whose eyes had grown dim and whose breath had been taken away. ‘My joy!’ he said, not knowing what words he spoke, not remembering them, not understanding himself, trembling lest a single puff of air destroy the magic, destroy everything which had happened to him, and which he was inclined to interpret more as vision than reality: so dark had it gone before his eyes! ‘I don’t know, I don’t understand you, I can’t

remember what you said just now, my reason is failing and my heart is aching within me, my sovereign lady!...'

Here his voice again sank away with emotion. She was pressing herself ever more closely, ever more warmly and passionately against him. He got up from where he had been lying and, no longer able to hold himself in check, helpless and paralysed with ecstasy, fell to his knees. At length sobs, convulsive and painful, broke from his chest, and his voice came straight from his heart and trembled like a string with the plenitude of an unknown delight and bliss.

'Who are you, my darling? Where have you come from, my dove?' he said, struggling to choke back his sobs. 'From what heaven have you flown into my skies? It's as though I were dreaming; I can't believe you are real. Don't reproach me... let me speak, let me tell you everything, everything!... I've wanted to speak to you for such a long time... Who are you, who are you, my joy?... How did you find your way to my heart? Tell me, have you long been my sister?... Tell me everything about yourself, where you have been until now – tell me the name of the place where you lived, what first won your affection there, what gave you joy and what made you unhappy... Was the air there warm, was the sky clear?... Who were the people you held dear, who loved you before I did, whom did your soul first treasure?... Did you have a natural mother, and did she cuddle you as a child, or did you grow accustomed, like I, to being alone? Tell me, have you always been as you are at present? What did you dream of, what did you predict for yourself, which of your hopes were realized and which came to nothing? Tell me it all... For whom did your maiden's heart first ache, and for what did you give it?... Tell me, my love, my light, my sister, tell me what I must do to win your heart!...'

Here his voice sank away again, and he inclined his head. But when he raised his eyes he was instantly frozen with speechless horror, and the hair on his head stood on end.

Katerina had turned as white as a sheet. She sat staring fixedly into space, her lips were blue, like those of a corpse, and her eyes were clouded with dumb, tormented agony. Slowly she rose to her feet, took two steps forward and collapsed with a piercing wail before the icon... Jerky, incoherent words broke from within her.

She lost consciousness. Ordynov, utterly shaken with terror, lifted her up and carried her to his bed; he stood over her, practically out of his mind. A moment later she opened her eyes, raised herself on one elbow, looked around her and seized his hand. She drew him towards her and struggled to whisper something with her still-pale lips, but her voice failed her. At last she burst into a deluge of tears; *the* hot droplets fell burning on Ordynov's cold hand.

'I am wretched, I am wretched now, my last hour is at hand!' she said at last, grieving in desperate torment.

She struggled to say something else, but her paralysed tongue could not utter a single word. She looked at Ordynov in despair, conscious that he did not understand her. He bent closer to her and listened... At last he heard her whisper, distinctly:

'I am depraved. I've been depraved, I've been ruined!'

Ordynov raised his head and looked at her in wild amazement. An outrageous thought had flashed through his mind. Katerina observed the morbid, convulsive spasm of his features.

'Yes! I've been depraved,' she went on. 'Depraved by an evil man – by *him*, my undoer!... I sold my soul to him... Why, why did you mention my mother? What need was there for you to torture me? May God, may God be your judge!...

A moment later she quietly began to cry; Ordynov's heart ached and hammered in mortal anguish.

'He says,' she whispered in a mysterious, strangled voice, 'that when he dies he will come and fetch my sinful soul... I am his, I have sold my soul to him... He has tortured me, he has read from his books to me... Here, see one of his books! Here is one. He says that I have committed a mortal sin... See, see...'

And she showed him a book; Ordynov did not notice where it had come from. He took it automatically, and saw that it was entirely handwritten, like the books of the Old Believers he had previously come across. Now, however, he had not the strength to focus his attention on anything. The book fell from his hands. He quietly embraced Katerina, trying to bring her to her senses.

'Enough, enough!' he said. 'You've had a fright; I am with you; rest with me, my darling, my love, my light!'

‘You know nothing, nothing!’ she said, squeezing his hands tightly. ‘I am always like this!... I am constantly afraid... Enough, don’t torment me any more!...’

‘At those times I go to him,’ she began after a moment, having paused to take breath. ‘Sometimes he merely talks to me for hours; at others he takes one of his books, the biggest one, and reads aloud to me from it. He always reads me such harsh, terrible things! I don’t know that I understand every word; but I am gripped by fear, and when I listen to his voice, it is as though it were not he who was speaking, but someone else, someone unkind, someone whom nothing will mollify, nothing will silence, and my heart becomes wretched, so wretched, it burns... More wretched than when this present anguish came upon me!’

‘Don’t go to him! Why do you go to him?’ Ordynov said, barely conscious of what he was saying.

‘Why have I come to you? I don’t know that either... All I do know is that he keeps telling me: “Pray, pray!” Sometimes I get up in the dead of night and pray for a long time, several hours; sleep often overcomes me; but my fear keeps waking me up, waking me up, and then it always seems to me that a storm is gathering around me, that harm will come to me, that evil people are going to torture me and tear me apart, that the saints will not answer my prayers for forgiveness and that they will not save me from cruel misery. My entire soul is torn asunder, my body feels as though it was about to melt away with tears... At that point I start praying again, and I pray and pray until the Sovereign Lady surveys me from the icon with a more affectionate look. Then I get up, go back to bed and sleep like a log; sometimes I even fall asleep on the floor, on my knees before the icon. Then, occasionally, he wakes up, calls me, begins to fondle me, caress me and console me, and then I feel better – no matter what disaster may threaten, with him I am not afraid. He is powerful! His word is mighty!’

‘But what is it, what sort of disaster can threaten you... ?’ Ordynov said, wringing his hands in despair.

Katerina had turned terribly pale. She was looking at him like someone who has been condemned to death and expects no pardon.

‘Me?... I am an accursed daughter, I am a murderess; my

mother put a curse on me! I ruined my own mother!’

Ordynov silently embraced her. She pressed herself quivering against him. He could feel a convulsive tremor passing through her entire body, and it seemed to him as though her soul were parting company with it.

‘I buried her in the cold earth,’ she said, utterly agitated by her memories, utterly possessed by visions of her irrevocable past. ‘I have long wanted to tell someone about it. He has consistently forbidden me to do things, whether by supplications, reproaches or angry words, and at times I feel as though he were my enemy and satan, so miserable does he make me. But at nights – as now – I keep remembering... Listen, listen! This happened a long time ago, a very long time ago, I don’t even remember when it was, but it seems like yesterday, like some dream I had which sucked at my heart all last night. Anguish makes the time doubly long. Sit, sit down here beside me: I will tell you all my woe; even though I am struck down, accursed as I am, by my mother’s curse... I will entrust my life to you...’

Ordynov was about to stop her, but she clasped her hands together, begging him to listen, and then began to speak again with even greater agitation. Her narrative was incoherent, in her words could be heard the tempest of her soul, but Ordynov understood all of it, because her life had become his life, her woe, his woe, and because his enemy already stood before him materialized in flesh and blood, growing in every word she uttered, seeming to crush his heart with inexhaustible strength, to curse and abuse him with malevolent hostility. His blood was aroused, his heart was overflowing and his thoughts confused. The evil old man of his dream (Ordynov was convinced of this) had come to life before him.

‘It was a night like this,’ Katerina began, ‘only even more threatening and the wind was howling around our forest as I had never heard it before... and on that night my ruin began! The oak-tree under our window blew down, and an old, grey-haired beggar came to our house. He said that he remembered that oak from when he was a little child, and that it had been the same then as it was now, when the wind proved too strong for it... That night – how I remember it all now! – one of my father’s barges was broken up by

the storm on the river, and even though he was racked by illness he rode off to the spot as soon as the fishermen came running to the mill to tell us what had happened. Mother and I were at home alone. I was drowsing, and she was mourning about something, and crying bitterly... yes, I knew why! She had just recovered from an illness, she was pale and kept telling me to get her shroud ready for her... Suddenly, at midnight, there was a knocking at the gate; I leapt up, the blood pumping to my heart; Mother gave a scream... I didn't look at her, I was afraid. I took the lamp and went to open the gate myself... It was *him*! I grew afraid, because I was always afraid when he arrived – it had been like that ever since I was a child, ever since I had acquired consciousness. His hair was not white in those days; his beard was jet-black, his eyes burned like coals, and never once before that time had he given me a kindly look. “Is your mother at home?” he asked. I closed the gate and said: “My father isn't.” “I know,” he said – and suddenly he looked at me, gave me such a look... it was the first time he had ever looked at me like that. I walked away, but he stood where he was. “Why don't you come inside?” I asked him. “I'm thinking,” he replied. We went up to the attic. “Why did you say your father wasn't at home when I asked if your mother was?” he said. I kept silent... Mother froze with horror – she rushed to him... he barely gave her a glance – I saw it all. He was wet all over, shivering; the storm had driven him twenty versts – but where he had come from and where he had been, neither mother nor I had any idea; we had not seen him for nine weeks... He threw off his cap, took off his mittens and, without praying to the icon or greeting his hosts, sat down next to the fire...’

Katerina passed her hand over her face, as though something were oppressing her and weighing on her, but a moment later she raised her head again and went on:

‘He began talking to Mother in Tatar. Mother knew the language, but I didn't understand a word. Other times when he'd come I'd been sent away; but this time Mother didn't dare say a word to her own child. The unclean spirit had taken possession of my soul and, full of self-pride, I looked at Mother. I could see they were looking at me, talking about me; she had begun to cry; I saw him reach for his dagger. It was not the first time I had seen him reach for his dagger of late when talking to my mother. I got up and

grabbed at his belt, tried to wrench the unclean dagger from him. He bared his teeth, snarled and tried to fend me off – he struck me in the breast, but failed to push me away. I thought I was going to die right then and there, my eyes clouded over. I fell to the floor – but I did not scream. With what little eyesight I had left I saw him remove his belt, roll up the sleeve on the arm with which he had struck me, take out his dagger and give it to me: “Here, cut my arm off, take pleasure in it in the degree to which I have insulted you, and meanwhile I, proud as I am, will bow to the earth before you.” I put down the dagger: my blood had begun to choke me, and I did not look at him. I remember that I smiled mockingly, with closed lips, and looked Mother straight in her sad eyes, a menacing look it was; the shameless mirth never left my lips, and Mother went on sitting there, pale and deathly...’

Ordynov listened with eager attention to her incoherent tale; but, in the wake of its first outpouring, little by little her agitation subsided; her speech became calmer; the poor woman was completely carried away by a sea of memories which scattered her anguish all over its limitless expanse.

‘He took his cap without saying a formal goodbye. I picked up the lamp again in order to show him out, instead of letting Mother do it; even though she was ill, she wanted to go after him. He and I arrived at the entrance: I said nothing, opened the wicket-gate for him and shooed away the dogs. I saw him take off his cap and bow to me. Then he felt inside his clothes, took out a little red box in morocco leather, and undid its catch. I looked: it contained large, round pearls – a present for me. “I have a pretty mistress in the suburbs,” he said. “I bought these as a present for her, but I haven’t taken them to her. You take them, fair maiden, to nurture your beauty; take them, even though you crush them underfoot.” I took them, but I didn’t want to crush them underfoot, I didn’t want to do them that much honour – I just took them, like the malicious wretch I was, and didn’t say a word. I went in and put them on the table for Mother to see – that was why I had accepted them. Mother said nothing for a bit, she was as white as a sheet, and she seemed afraid to talk to me. “What are these, Katya?” she asked, eventually. And I replied: “Some merchant has brought them for you, I don’t know anything about them.” I could see tears breaking from her eyes, and she gasped for breath. “Not for me, Katya; not for me,

wicked daughter, not for me.” I remember how bitterly, bitterly she said it, as if she were weeping out her entire soul. I raised my eyes, and was about to throw myself at her feet, when the devil suddenly whispered in my ear, and I said: “Well, if they’re not for you, they’re doubtless for Father; I’ll give them to him when he gets back; I’ll tell him some merchants were here and forgot their wares...” “Then how she wept and wailed, my mother...” “I’ll tell him himself what kind of merchants have been here and what kind of wares they came for...” I’ll tell him whose daughter you are, you lawless hussy! You are no daughter of mine now, you are a snake in the grass! Accursed, monstrous child!” I said nothing, and my tears would not come... Oh! it was as though everything in me had died... I went up to my room in the attic and lay awake all night listening to the storm, shaping my thoughts to the storm’s accompaniment.

‘Five days went by. Five days later, towards evening, my father returned, surly and threatening – he had been injured on the way. I could see that his arm was bandaged up; I guessed that an enemy had waylaid him; the enemy had worn him out and inflicted an injury on him. I also knew who the enemy was. I knew it all. He said not a word to Mother, he didn’t ask about me, he summoned all the mill-hands together, ordered the mill to be stopped and told everyone to guard the house from the evil eye. I could feel in my heart, at that hour, that things were not right in our house. Well, we waited; another night went by, stormy, with blizzards, and fear gripped my soul. I opened the window – my face was burning, my eyes were streaming with tears, my restless heart was scorching me from within; the whole of my being was on fire, so badly did I want to escape from my attic room, far, far away, to the ends of the earth, where the lightning and storms are born. My maiden’s breast shook and trembled... Suddenly, quite late at night – I seemed to have drowsed off, or else a fog had descended on my soul, obscuring my reason – I heard someone knocking at the window, and crying: “Open up!” I could see a man clambering at the window on the end of a rope. I at once recognized my visitor’s identity, opened the window and let him into my solitary attic room. It was *him*! Without taking off his cap, he sat down on the bench, panting, hardly able to get his breath, as though he were being pursued. I kept to one corner, and knew that I had turned quite pale. “Is your father at home?” he asked. “Yes, he is.” “And your mother?” “My

mother's at home, too." "Keep quiet. Can you hear something?" "Yes, I can." "What can you hear?" "Someone whistling under the window!" "So, fair maiden, do you want to take your enemy's life – to summon your father and bring my soul to perdition? I shall not escape your maiden's will; here is my rope: tie me up with it, if your heart commands you to take revenge for the offence you have suffered." I made no response. "Well? What is it to be, my darling?" "What do you want?" "I want to get rid of my enemy, say farewell to my old love once and for all and greet a new love, a young love, such as yourself, fair maiden, with all my soul..." I began to laugh; I don't know how it was, but his words found their way to my heart. "Let me go downstairs, fair maiden, let me follow my own heart and make a request to the master and mistress." I was shivering all over, my teeth were chattering, and my heart felt like red-hot iron. I went and opened the door for him, let him down into the house, and it was only as he was crossing the threshold that I said, with an effort: "Here! Take your pearls and never give me anything else ever again." And I threw the little box after him.'

Here Katerina paused to take breath; now she trembled like a leaf and grew pale, now the blood rushed to her face, so that now, as she stopped talking, her cheeks burned like fire, her eyes glittered through her tears, and her breast shook with heavy, impetuous breathing. But suddenly she again turned pale, and her voice grew lower, trembling anxiously and sadly.

"Then I was left alone, and a storm seemed to wrap me round on all sides. Suddenly I heard shouting, I could hear mill-hands running across the yard to the mill, and voices saying: "The mill's on fire." I hid myself. Everyone came running out of the house; I was left alone with Mother. I knew that she was going to die – she had been lying on her deathbed for three days now – I knew it, accursed daughter that I was!... Suddenly I heard a faint cry beneath my attic window, like the cry of a child that has had a frightening dream, and then all was quiet again. I blew out my candle; the blood froze in my veins. I covered my face with my hands, afraid to look. Suddenly I heard a shout right beside me, and heard men running out of the mill. I leaned out of the window: I could see them carrying my dead father, and I could hear them saying to one another: "He slipped and fell down the stairs into a red-hot cauldron; the devil must have pushed him." I fell on to my

bed; I was waiting, rigid with fear, yet I didn't know whom or what I was waiting for; all I knew was that I felt very wretched in that hour. I don't remember how long I waited; I remember that suddenly everything began to sway before me, my head grew heavy, my eyes smarted with smoke; and I was glad that my end was near! Suddenly I felt someone raising me by the shoulders. I looked as far as I was able to look: he was singing all over and his caftan was hot to the touch, and smoking.

"I have come for you, fair maiden," he said; "lead me away from misfortune, as previously you led me to it; I have ruined my soul for your sake. I will never be able to say enough prayers to atone for this accursed night! Perhaps we should join forces and pray together!" And he laughed, the evil man! "Show me how to get out of here without meeting anyone," he said. I took him by the arm and led him after me. We went along the passage; I had the keys with me, and I opened the door to the pantry for him and showed him the window. It gave on to the garden. He seized me in his mighty arms, embraced me and together we jumped out of the window. We ran, arm in arm, for a long time. We looked, and found ourselves in a thick, dark forest. He began to listen: "They're hunting us, Katya! They're hunting us, fair maiden, but we shall not lay down our lives so easily! Kiss me, fair maiden, for love and eternal happiness!" "But why are your hands covered in blood?" I asked. "Oh, I cut the throats of your dogs," he replied. "They were barking far too loudly at nocturnal visitors. Let's be off!" On we ran; on the path we saw father's horse – it had broken loose from its bridle and escaped from the stable; it had obviously not felt like being burned alive! "Get on to the horse with me, Katya!" he said. "God has sent us help." I made no reply. "Don't you want to?" he said. "I mean, I'm not a heathen, one of your unclean types; look, I'll cross myself if you like." And he did. I got on to the horse, pressed myself close to him and completely lost consciousness in his arms – it was as though I had been overcome by a kind of slumber. When I regained my senses, I saw that we had reached the bank of a very wide river. He dismounted, lifted me down from the horse and waded into the reeds: he had hidden his rowing-boat there. As we were getting into it, he said: "Well, goodbye, trusty horse: go and find yourself a new master – your old ones are leaving you!" I rushed to father's horse and gave it a warm, parting hug. Then we finally embarked, he took the oars and in a moment we could no

longer see the riverbank, When we got to that point, where we could no longer see the bank, I saw him ship the oars and look around him over all the wide expanse of water.

“Greetings, mother, stormy river, assuager of men’s thirst, and my provider,” he said. “Tell me, have you guarded my treasure well in my absence, are my wares intact?” I kept silent, and lowered my eyes to my bosom; my face was burning with shame. Then he: “Take everything I own, stormy, insatiable one, but give me your vow to guard and cherish my priceless pearl! One single word from you, fair maiden, will shine like a sun through the storm, with its rathance dispel the dark night!” He smiled mockingly as he spoke; his heart was burning for me, but I could not endure his smiles for shame; I wanted to say something, but was afraid to, and kept silent. “Well, so be it!” he replied to my timid brooding; he spoke as though in sorrow, as though sorrow had overtaken him, too. “After all, one gains nothing by force. God be with you, my haughty one, my little dove, fair maiden! Your hatred for me is evidently great, or perhaps it is simply that I have not found favour in your bright eyes.” I listened, and as I did so I was overcome by anger, anger prompted by love; mastering my emotions, I said: “Whether you have found favour or not is not for me to tell, but doubtless for some other, foolish, shameless girl who has shamed her attic room on a dark night and sold her soul for the sake of mortal sin, unable to contain her reckless heart; my scalding tears can tell it, as can the man who brags like a thief about another’s misfortune and jeers at a maiden’s heart!” I said what I had wanted to say, but could bear it all no longer, and burst into tears... He said nothing, merely looked at me in such a way that I began to tremble like a leaf. “Listen, fair maiden,” he said – and his eyes had a strange light in them – “I do not speak idly, but give you my honest word: in as much as you make me happy, I will be your master, but if ever you take a dislike to me – and you need not say a word, you need make no effort, the merest flicker of your sable brow, of your black eyes, the tiniest motion of your little finger, and I will give you back your love together with your golden freedom; only then, my proud, intolerable love, then my life will be at an end!” And at those words my flesh smiled a pitying smile.’

Here Katerina broke off her narrative in deep agitation; she drew in her breath and breathed out again, smiling wryly at the

new idea which had occurred to her. She was about to continue when suddenly her glittering eyes encountered the inflamed gaze of Ordynov, which was fixed on her. She started with a shiver and tried to say something, but the blood rushed to her face... She covered her eyes with her hands and fell face down on the pillows as though she had fainted. Ordynov was shaken to the marrow of his being. A strange, tormenting emotion, an uncontrollable, unbearable disturbance coursed like poison through his veins, growing with each word of Katerina's story: a desperate yearning, a passion that was greedy and intolerable, seized his thoughts and clouded his feelings. But at the same time a sadness, heavy and infinite, weighed ever more crushingly on his heart. At moments he wanted to shout at Katerina, tell her to be quiet, he wanted to throw himself at her feet and beg her in tears to return to him his former agonies of love, his former pure, instinctive yearning, and with a pang of regret he remembered his long-since dried tears. His heart ached and bled with tenderness, yet surrendered no tears to his lacerated soul. He could not understand what Katerina was saying to him, and his love had taken fright at the emotions that were surging up in the poor woman. In that moment he cursed his passion: it was choking him, torturing him, and he felt as though molten lead was flowing in his veins instead of blood.

‘Oh, but that is not what grieves me,’ Katerina said, raising her head suddenly. ‘What I have just told you – that is not what grieves me’ she continued in a voice that had begun to resonate like copper with a new, unexpected emotion, until her entire soul was bursting with concealed, desperate tears. ‘That is not what grieves me, that is not what worries and torments me! What, what do I care about my mother, even though I shall never find another like her in all the world? What do I care that she cursed me in her last, desperate hour? What do I care about my former golden life, my warm attic room, my maiden's freedom? What do I care that I have sold myself to the unclean one and given up my soul to my undoer, that I have committed mortal sin for the sake of happiness? Oh, that is not what grieves me, even though my undoing is great thereby! No, what grieves me and tears at my heart is that I am his degraded slave, that my shame and my degradation are sweet to me, shameless woman that I am, that my greedy heart finds it sweet to remember my suffering as though it were joy and happiness – what grieves me is that there is in my heart no strength, no anger at my

humiliation!...’

The poor woman suddenly lost her breath, and a convulsive, hysterical sobbing cut short the flow of her words. Her lips burned with hot, impetuous breathing, her bosom rose and sank deeply, and her eyes flashed with a mysterious indignation. But by such enchantment were her features gilded in that moment, with such passionate, unendurable, unheard-of beauty did each line, each muscle of her face tremble, that Ordynov’s dark brooding instantly subsided and the pure sadness faded within his breast. His heart yearned to press itself to hers and to forget itself passionately in it, united with it in a reckless excitement, to beat in harmony with the same storm, the same onslaught of mysterious passion and to thrill with it in expectancy of the same intense emotion. Katerina met Ordynov’s clouded gaze, and the smile she gave him made a redoubled current of fire pass through his heart. He was practically beside himself.

‘Have pity on me, have mercy on me!’ he whispered, holding his trembling voice in check, leaning down to her, supporting himself with one arm on her shoulder and looking her in the eyes closely, so closely that their breathing fused into one. ‘You are my undoing! I don’t know the cause of your suffering, and my soul is confused... What business is it of mine to know what your heart is weeping about? Only speak... and I will obey. Come with me, come, don’t make me despair, don’t drain the life from me!...’

Katerina was looking at him fixedly; on her burning cheeks her tears had dried. She made as though to interrupt him, took him by the arm, tried to say something, but seemed unable to find the words. A strange smile slowly appeared on her lips; it was as though she were trying to laugh.

‘I don’t think I’ve told you everything,’ she said at last in an unsteady voice. ‘I shall tell you more; only please, please will you listen to me, ardent heart? Obey your sister! It seems you have little knowledge of her cruel grief. I should like to tell you how I lived with him for a year, but I won’t... A year went by, he set off down the river with some companions of his, and I stayed behind to wait at the landing-stage with his foster-mother. I waited for him for a month or two – and in the settlement I met a young merchant. I glanced at him and remembered my former golden years. “Dear

sister!” he said, after we had exchanged a few words. “I’m Alyosha, your intended bridegroom. The old folk married us by word of mouth when we were children; if you’ve forgotten me, then remember me now – I’m from your village...” “And what do the people in our village say about me?” “Rumour has it that you entered into dishonourable relations, that you forgot your maiden’s modesty and took up with a brigand, a murderer,” Alyosha told me, laughing. “And what did you tell them about me?” “When I arrived here I wanted to tell them a lot of things,” he said, and his heart became troubled. “I wanted to tell them a lot of things, but ever since I laid eyes on you I have grown numb; you have been my undoing!” he said. “But my soul, too, take it, I don’t care if you laugh at my feelings, at my love, fair maiden. I’m an orphan now, I’m my own master, and my soul’s my own, too: it doesn’t belong to anyone else, and I haven’t sold it to anyone, not like a certain woman I could mention who has snuffed out her memory, and I don’t need to sell my heart – I’ll give it to you for nothing, and it’s evidently a good bargain!” I laughed; it was not to be our last conversation – he stayed on the farm for a whole month, abandoned his wares, dismissed his workmen and remained all on his own. I took pity on his orphan’s tears. One morning I said to him: “Alyosha, wait for me down by the landing-stage when it gets dark; we’ll go to your village together! I’m fed up with my miserable life!” Well, night came, I did up my bundle, and my soul began to ache and overflow. Then, strangely and unexpectedly, I saw my master walk in. “Hello; let’s be off, there’s going to be a storm on the river, and time will not wait.” I followed him out, and we went down to the river; it was a long journey to where his men were; we looked: there was a rowing-boat, and the oarsman in it was familiar to us – he seemed to be waiting for someone. “Hello, Alyosha,” my master cried, “may God give you strength! I expect you’ve been held up at the landing-stage and are hurrying now to rejoin your boats. Good man, will you row the mistress and myself to the village where our men are? I’ve let our boat go, and I can’t swim.” “Get in,” said Alyosha, and my soul pined and languished at the sound of his voice. “Get in, together with your mistress; the wind is for all, and there will be room in my house for you, too.” We got in; it was a dark night, the stars were not visible, the wind had begun to howl and the waves were rising; we rowed a verst from the bank, and were silent, all three.

"A storm!" my master said. "And this storm is a bad omen. I have never seen a storm on the river like the one that is brewing now in all my born days. Our boat will not weather it! It will not carry three!" "No, it will not," Alyosha replied, "and it appears that one of us is one too many." As he spoke, his voice trembled like a string. "What do you say, Alyosha?" my master said, "I knew you when you were only a little child, your father and I were like brothers, we shared each other's hospitality. Tell me, Alyosha, do you think you can swim your way to the bank, or will you perish for nothing, and lose your life?" "No, I won't reach it! But what about you, good sir? If the hour is not propitious, and you must drink of the deep, will you reach the bank or not?" "I won't reach it; it would be the end of me, I could not stand up to the stormy river. Listen now, Katerina, my priceless pearl! I remember a night like this, only then the waves were not heaving, the stars were out and the moon was shining... I want to ask you, simply: have you forgotten?" "No, I remember," I said... "Well, if you haven't forgotten it, then you won't have forgotten the pact by which a certain stalwart lad instructed a fair maiden to reclaim her freedom from a man she did not love – eh?" "No, I haven't forgotten it," I said, more dead than alive. "Ah, so you haven't forgotten! Well, now our boat is too heavy. Hasn't someone's time come? Tell us, my darling, tell us, my dove, coo to us gently what you have to say..."

'I did not say anything... !' Katerina whispered, palely... She had not finished her story.

'Katerina!' a hoarse, hollow voice said above them.

Ordynov started. In the doorway stood Murin. He was barely covered by his fur bedspread, looked as pale as death and was staring at them with eyes that were almost insane. Katerina was growing paler and paler, returning his gaze fixedly, as though she were in a trance.

'Come here, Katerina!' the sick man whispered in a voice that was barely audible, and went out of the room. Katerina kept staring fixedly into space, as if the old man were still standing in front of her. But suddenly the blood returned in a fiery glow to her pallid cheeks, and she slowly got up from the bed. Ordynov found himself remembering their first meeting.

'Until tomorrow then, my tears!' she said, smiling strangely.

‘Until tomorrow! Remember the point at which I stopped: “Choose one of two: whom do you love, whom do you not love, fair maiden?” Will you remember that, will you wait for one more night?’ she repeated, putting her hands on his shoulders and surveying him tenderly.

‘Katerina, don’t go, don’t destroy yourself! He’s mad!’ Ordynov whispered, trembling for her.

‘Katerina!’ a voice said behind the partition.

‘What? Do you think he’ll cut my diroat?’ Katerina replied, laughing. ‘Good night to you, my beloved heart, my ardent dove, my darling brother!’ she said, tenderly pressing his head to her bosom, and her face was suddenly bathed in tears. ‘These are my last tears. Sleep away your unhappiness, my darling, tomorrow you will awake to joy.’ And she gave him a passionate kiss.

‘Katerina! Katerina!’ Ordynov whispered, falling on his knees before her and endeavouring to detain her.

‘Katerina!’

She turned round, nodded smilingly to him, and went out of the room. Ordynov heard her go into Murin’s room; he held his breath, listening; but he did not hear any further sound. The old man was keeping silent, or perhaps he was already unconscious... He would have gone to her in there, but his legs gave way under him... He grew weak and sat down on the bed...

II

When he awoke it took him a long time to work out what time it was. It was either dawn or dusk; his room was still dark. He was unable to determine just how long he had slept, but had a feeling that his sleep had not been a healthy one. As he regained consciousness he passed his hand over his face as if to brush away sleep and the visions of the night. But when he tried to stand up, he felt as though his entire body had been paralysed, and his exhausted limbs refused to obey him. His head was aching and spinning, and alternate waves of shivering and fever kept passing

through him. With consciousness returned memory, and his heart trembled as in a single instant he relived the experiences of the night that had just gone by. His heart beat violently in response to his musing, and so fresh and burningly immediate were his sensations that it seemed not a night, not long hours but only a moment had passed since Katerina's departure. He felt that the tears in his eyes had not yet had time to dry – or were these new, fresh tears which had welled like a spring from his burning soul? It was strange – his torments even appeared sweet to him, though he had an obscure sense throughout the whole of his being that he would not be able to withstand another such onslaught. For a moment he almost felt the presence of death, and was ready to greet it as a welcome guest: so strained was his imagination, with such an overwhelming rush had his passion re-erupted on his awakening, by such a wave of ecstasy had his soul been washed that his life, accelerated by this intense activity, seemed on the point of breaking, of being destroyed, of dying away in a single flash and of being extinguished for ever. Practically at that very moment, as if in response to his anguish, in response to his trembling heart, there rang out the familiar – familiar as that inner music heard by a man's soul in the hour of joy at being alive, in the hour of tranquil happiness – thick, silvery voice of Katerina. Near, beside, almost above the head of his bed a song began, quiet and melancholy at first... Now her voice rose, now it fell, dying convulsively, as though it concealed and tenderly cherished the restless torment of insatiable, repressed desire, desperately hidden in a languishing heart; then once more it overflowed in nightingale-like trills and, trembling and burning with a passion that was now uncontainable, flooded into a veritable sea of ecstasy, a sea of mighty resonances, limitless as the first moment of bliss. Ordynov could make out the words, too: they were simple, sincere, composed long ago, with an emotion that was direct, calm, pure and self-explanatory. But he paid no attention to them, listening to the sounds alone. Through the simple, naive verses of the song he caught a shimmering glimpse of other words, which detonated with all the yearning that filled his breast, responding to the innermost windings – enigmatic even to himself – of his passion, resonating with a clear and perfect awareness of it. Now he heard the last, desperate groan of a heart dying in passion, now the joy of a will and a spirit that had broken their fetters and were rushing brightly and freely into a limitless sea

of unbridled love; now he heard the first vow of a mistress, uttered with sweet-scented shame at the first blush on her face, with prayers, with tears, with a mysterious, timid whisper; now the lust of a Bacchante, proud and joyous in its strength, naked, stripped of mystery, making her drunken eyes roll to the accompaniment of tinkling laughter...

Ordynov could not bear to wait for the song's conclusion, and he got up from the bed. The singing at once died away.

'The morning and the afternoon have come and gone, my heart's desire!' said Katerina's voice. 'Good evening to you! Get up, come to us, awake to radiant joy; we are waiting for you, the master and I, good people both, obedient to your will; douse your hatred with love, if your heart still bleeds with offence. Let us hear a kind word from you!...'

Ordynov had emerged from his room at the first sound of her voice, and was scarcely aware he was entering his landlord's bedroom. Ahead of him the door opened and, bright as the sun, the golden smile of his beautiful landlady shone towards him. At that moment he saw and heard no one but her. In a flash all his life, all his joy fused into one single focus within his heart – the radiant form of his Katerina.

'Two sunsets have passed since you and I said farewell; the second is dying now, look out of the window. Like the two sunsets in the soul of a fair maiden,' Katerina said, laughing. 'The one that reddens her face with her first shame when for the first time her lonely maiden's heart speaks within her bosom, and the other, which burns like a fire when the fair maiden forgets her first shame, which lies heavy on her maiden's bosom and drives the red blood to her face... Come in, come into our house, good stalwart young man! Why do you stand on the threshold? Welcome in, and let the master greet you!'

With a musical laugh she took Ordynov's hand and led him into the room. Timidity entered his heart. All the ardour, the entire conflagration that had raged within his breast seemed to die away in a single instant and for a single instant; he lowered his eyes in confusion, afraid to look at her. He felt she was so wonderfully beautiful that his heart would not be able to endure her intensely burning gaze. Never before had he seen his Katerina like this. Now,

for the first time, mirth and laughter had begun to sparkle in her features, drying the sad tears on her black eyelashes. His hand trembled in hers. If he had raised his eyes, he would have seen that Katerina, with a triumphant smile, had riveted her brilliant gaze to his face, which was clouded by confusion and passion.

‘Get up, old man!’ she said, at last, as though she were coming to herself. ‘Say a kind word to our guest – a guest who is like a brother to us! Get up, unbowing, arrogant old man, get up and bow, take our guest by his white hands, sit him down at table!’

Ordynov raised his eyes, and only now seemed to remember where he was. Only now did he give any thought to Murin. The old man’s eyes, which seemed to have grown dim with the melancholy of approaching death, were looking at him fixedly; and with pain in his soul he remembered this gaze, which had last glittered towards him from under black, beetling brows which then, as now, had been knit with wrath and anguish. His head had begun to spin slightly. He looked around him and only now grasped everything clearly and distinctly. Murin was still lying on the bed, but was now more or less properly dressed, and looked as though he had been up and about ever since the morning. His neck was tied, as before, with a red neckerchief, and he wore slippers on his feet. His bout of illness had evidently passed; only his face was still fearfully pale and yellow. Katerina stood by his bedside, leaning on the table with one arm, and looking at them both attentively. Her welcoming smile did not, however, fade. It seemed as though all this had happened at her bidding.

‘Ah, it’s you,’ Murin said, raising himself a little and sitting up in bed. ‘You’re my lodger. Sir, I owe you an apology. I wronged you and offended you quite without meaning to when I played those tricks with my gun the other day. Who could have known that you too were afflicted with the black infirmity? I get taken with it,’ he added in a hoarse, sickly voice, knitting his brows and involuntarily looking away from Ordynov. ‘When the calamity arrives it doesn’t knock at the door, but steals in like a thief! The other day I nearly stuck my dagger into her breast...’ he said, nodding in Katerina’s direction. ‘When I’m ill I have fits, and – well, that’s enough for you. Sit down – be our guest!’

Ordynov was still looking at him fixedly.

‘Sit down, then, sit down!’ the old man cried, impatiently. ‘Sit down, if that’s what she wants! Just look at you, you’re as close as brother and sister! You’ve fallen for each other like a pair of lovers!’

Ordynov sat down.

‘You see what kind of a sister you’ve got,’ the old man went on, laughing and showing two rows of perfect, white teeth. ‘Exchange caresses, my dears! Don’t you think your sister’s rather nice-looking, sir? Come on, let’s hear you speak! Oh, look, her cheeks are simply burning. Go on, look round, honour a beautiful woman to all the world! Show that your zealous heart is aching for her!’

Ordynov frowned and gave the old man a look of intense hatred. The old man flinched from his gaze. A blind fury erupted in Ordynov’s breast. With a kind of animal instinct he sensed near him the presence of a deadly enemy. He did not know what was happening to him, his reason refused to obey him.

‘Don’t look!’ a voice said behind him. Ordynov looked round.

‘Don’t look, don’t look, I say, or has the devil got into you? Have pity on your love,’ said Katerina, laughing, and she suddenly put her hands over his eyes from behind; then she at once took her hands away and covered her face with them. But the blush on her features seemed to break through her fingers. She removed her hands and, burning all over like fire, attempted to meet their laughter and inquisitive gazes brightly and calmly. Both men, however, viewed her in silence – Ordynov in a kind of bewilderment of love, as though this terrible beauty were piercing his heart for the first time; the old man intently and coldly. His pale features displayed no emotion; only his blue lips trembled slightly.

Katerina went over to the table; not laughing now, she began to clear away books, paper, inkwell, the table’s entire contents, putting them all on the windowsill. Her breathing was quick and impetuous, and from time to time she sucked air avidly into herself, as though her heart were constricted. Heavily, like a wave breaking on a shore, her full breast sank and rose again. She lowered her eyes, and her jet-black eyelashes gleamed against her radiant cheeks like sharp needles...

‘A Tsar-maiden!’ the old man said.

‘My sovereign Queen!’ Ordynov whispered, quivering all over.

Feeling the old man's gaze on him, he came to himself: for a moment that gaze flashed like lightning – cruel, voracious, coldly contemptuous. Ordynov attempted to get up, but his legs seemed paralysed by an unseen force. He fell back into his chair again. From time to time he gave himself a pinch, as though he were not sure that what was happening was real. He felt as though he were being smothered by a nightmare, as though he were still sunk in a feverish, unhealthy sleep from which, strangely, he did not want to awake...

Katerina removed the old rug from the table and replaced it with an exquisite cloth, embroidered all over in brightly coloured silk and gold, which she took from a trunk. Then from a cupboard she produced an old-fashioned, ancestral cellaret made entirely of silver, placed it in the centre of the table and took from it three silver wine-cups – one for the master, one for the guest and one for herself; then with a haughty, almost reflective look she surveyed the old man and the guest.

‘Which of you is not liked by the other?’ she said. ‘Whichever of you it is, I love him, and he will drink from my cup. And as for myself, I love each of you, each is dear to me: so let us drink to love and harmony!’

‘Let us drink and drown our black thoughts in wine!’ said the old man in an altered voice. ‘Pour it for us, Katerina!’

‘Would you like me to pour you some?’ Katerina asked, looking at Ordynov.

Ordynov silently pushed his cup towards her.

‘Wait! If anyone has a secret wish, let it come true!’ said the old man, raising his cup.

They all knocked their cups together and drained them.

‘Now let you and I drink together, old man!’ said Katerina, turning to her master. ‘Let us drink, if your heart has any fondness for me! Let us drink to the happiness we have known, give a greeting to the years we have lived, bow to fortune in love and heartfelt thanks. Let me fill your cup, if your heart has any warm feelings for me.’

‘Your wine is strong, my little dove, but you yourself are only

moistening your lips!’ said the old man, laughing and holding out his cup a second time.

‘Yes, I shall only take a mouthful, but you must drain your cup to the bottom!... Why live, dragging heavy thoughts about with you, old man? Heavy thoughts only make the heart ache! Thoughts come of sorrow, thoughts call to sorrow, in happiness there are no thoughts! Drink, old man! Drown your thoughts!’

‘Much sorrow must have gathered within you, since you are so embattled against it! You evidently want to do away with it at once, my little white dove. I drink with you, Katya! And do you have any sorrows, sir, may I ask?’

‘Those that I have I keep to myself,’ Ordynov whispered, never taking his eyes off Katerina.

‘Did you hear that, old man? For a long time I, too, did not know myself, was not conscious of myself – but the time came when I gained that knowledge, that consciousness; I relived all that I had experienced, with an insatiable soul.’

‘Yes, it is bitter when one begins to struggle through to one’s past,’ the old man said, meditatively. ‘What is past is like wine that’s been drunk! What happiness is there in the past? The caftan’s worn out, and away with it...’

‘Then you must get a new one!’ Katerina said, breaking in with a strained laugh, and two large teardrops hung like diamonds from her glittering eyelashes. ‘After all, you can’t live an entire life in the space of one minute, and a maiden’s heart is lively, you’ll never catch up with it! Haven’t you learnt that, old man? Look, I’ve buried one of my tears in your wine-cup!’

‘Did you buy your sorrow at the price of much happiness?’ Ordynov asked, and his voice trembled with emotion.

‘Really, sir, you must have a lot of your own for sale, to go barging in unasked like that,’ said the old man. And he chortled with malevolent, inaudible laughter, giving Ordynov an insolent stare.

‘What I sold my happiness for is in the past,’ Katerina replied, in a voice that sounded hurt and displeased. ‘To some it might seem too high a price, others might think it too low. Some people want to

give away everything and see no reason for taking anything, while others promise nothing but have an obedient heart to follow them around. Don't be too hard on people,' she said, looking sadly at Ordynov. 'One person is one way, and another person is another way, and goodness only knows why the one seeks out the other! Fill your cup, old man! Drink to the happiness of your loving daughter, your quiet, obedient slave, as she was when first you came to know her. Raise your cup!'

'Very well, then. Fill yours, too!' said the old man, picking up his wine.

'Wait, old man! Don't drink more yet – let's talk a bit first...'

Katerina leaned her elbows on the table and looked fixedly into the old man's face with eyes that were passionate and on fire. A strange determination shone in them. But all her movements were restless, and her gestures were impetuous, swift, unexpected. It was as if she were ablaze from top to toe, and this was taking place in a wondrous fashion. Somehow her beauty seemed to intensify along with her excitement and animation. From her lips, which were opened in a smile that showed two rows of white teeth as regular as pearls, there came an impetuous breathing which slightly dilated her nostrils. Her bosom was agitated; the plait of her hair, which was twisted in a threefold bun at the nape of her neck, fell slightly on to her left ear in a careless manner, covering part of her burning cheek. A light perspiration stood out on her temples.

'Tell me my fortune, old man! Tell it for me, father, tell it before you drink your mind away; here is my white palm! After all, it is not for nothing that people call you a sorcerer. You have learned from books, and know the black lore inside out! Look, old man, tell me all my miserable fate; only see you don't lie! Come, tell me as you know how to – will your daughter find happiness, or will you not forgive her, and bring down upon her head a fate of evil and sorrow? Tell me, will the corner I inhabit be warm, or shall I, like a bird of passage, be all my life an orphan, seeking a place for myself among kind people? Tell me who my enemy is, who cherishes love for me, who is preparing evil for me? Tell me, will my young, passionate heart live out its days in isolation and die prematurely, or will it find its equal and beat with it in joyful harmony... until new sorrow comes! Tell me once and for all, old man, in what blue

sky, beyond what seas and forests my bright falcon lives, whether he is keenly spying out for himself a falcon-mate, whether he will wait for me lovingly, love me with a strong love or soon fall out of love with me, deceive me or not deceive me? And finally, tell me, old man, are you and I to while away our lives much longer in this soulless corner reading black books; and when will I bow low to you, old man, take my leave of you for ever, thank you for your hospitality, for giving me to eat and drink, and telling me your stories?... Yes, see that you tell the whole truth, don't lie; the time has come, stand up for yourself!

Her animation grew greater and greater until her last word, when her voice suddenly sank away in emotion, as though a whirlwind had carried off her heart. Her eyes glittered, and her upper lip trembled slightly. A venomous mockery snaked and slithered in her every word, but a weeping seemed to ring out in her laughter. She leaned over the table towards the old man and looked fixedly, with avid attention into his dulled eyes. As she finished speaking, Ordynov heard her heart suddenly begin to throb; when he looked at her, he cried out in ecstasy, and tried to get up from the bench. But the old man's cursory, instantaneous gaze once again rooted him to the spot. A strange mixture of contempt, mockery and impatient, irritated restlessness together with a sly, malevolent curiosity glowed in that cursory, instantaneous gaze, which never failed to make Ordynov flinch and on each occasion filled his heart with bile, vexation and impotent rage.

Meditatively and with a kind of sad curiosity the old man looked at his Katerina. His heart had been wounded, the words had been said. But not a muscle of his face moved. When she finished, he merely smiled.

'You want to know a great many things all at once, my fully fledged little bird, my startled pigeon! You had better fill my cup deep; let us drink first to reconciliation and good will; otherwise someone's black and unclean eye will spoil my prediction. The devil is powerful! Sin is ever near!'

He raised his cup and drained it. The more wine he drank, the paler he grew. His eyes became red as live coals. It was evident that their hectic lustre and the sudden, corpse-like blueness of his face

heralded a fresh attack of his infirmity. The wine was strong, and after only one cup of it Ordynov's head was reeling more and more. His feverishly inflamed blood could restrain itself no longer: it flooded his heart, obscuring his reason and confusing it. His agitation grew worse and worse. He went on pouring wine for himself and gulping down mouthfuls of it, not knowing what to do in order to quell his increasing excitement, and the blood hurtled ever more swiftly through his veins. He was in a kind of delirium, and even though he strained his attention to the uttermost he could hardly follow what was going on between his strange landlord and landlady.

The old man brought his silver cup down on the table with a loud clang.

'Fill my cup, Katerina!' he cried. 'Fill it again, wicked daughter, and again, until I collapse! Lay the old man to rest, and have done with him! That's right, fill my cup again, go on, fill it, you beautiful girl! Let's drain our cups together! Why aren't you drinking? Or have I not been looking...'

Katerina made some reply, but Ordynov could not hear what it was: the old man would not let her finish; he seized her by the arm, as though he were no longer able to contain all the emotions that were jostling within his breast. His face was pale; at one moment his eyes grew dim and lustreless, at the next they flared with a brilliant light; his white lips trembled, and in an unsteady, confused voice, in which at moments there flashed a kind of strange ecstasy, he said to her:

'Give me your hand, beautiful girl! Let me tell your fortune – I will tell you the whole truth. I am indeed a sorcerer; you are not mistaken, Katerina! Your little golden heart did not deceive you when it told you that I am its sorcerer, and I shall not conceal the truth from it, simple and artless as it is! But there is one thing which you have not understood: it is not for me, a sorcerer, to teach you intellect and reason! Reason does not bring a maiden freedom; she can hear the truth in its entirety, yet still not seem to know or understand. Her head is a cunning serpent, even though her heart is flooded with tears. She will find her own path, snake her way through calamity on her belly, preserve her cunning freedom! Where she can, she will take by intelligence, and where she cannot,

she will cloud the mind with beauty, intoxicate it with her evil eye – beauty destroys strength; even a heart of iron will crack down the middle! You ask me if you will know sadness and sorrow? Heavy is human sadness! But calamity does not strike feeble hearts. It is strong hearts that grow acquainted with calamity; they melt quietly with bloody tears but do not go begging for sympathy from people in sweet shame: your suffering, maiden, will be like a footprint in the sand – the rain will wash it, the sun will dry it, the stormy wind will blow it and sweep it away! Let me say this, too, with the advantage of the second sight: whoever falls in love with you, you will be his slave, you will surrender your freedom to him and give it to him as a pledge, never to reclaim it; you will not be able to fall out of love with him again when the allotted term is up; you will plant one single grain, but your undoer will harvest a whole ear! My tender child, my head of gold, you buried your pearl-like tear in my wine-cup, but you were not able to endure its loss, and at once you shed a hundred more, wasted your beautiful words in boasting of your life's sufferings! And yet there is no need for you to grieve for your tear, your heavenly dewdrop! It will return to you with interest, your pearly tear, in the long, miserable night when cruel sorrow and unclean thoughts will gnaw at you – then because of that same tear someone else's tear will drop on to your passionate heart, a tear that is mingled with blood, not warm, but like molten lead; it will inflame your white breast until the blood comes, and as you wait for morning, the kind of gloomy, depressing morning that comes on wet days, you will toss and turn in your little bed, shedding your scarlet blood, and your fresh wound will not heal until the morning after that. Fill my cup again, Katerina, fill it, my little dove, fill it for my wise advice; and let us waste no more words...'

His voice grew weak, and began to tremble: an attack of sobbing seemed about to burst from his breast... He filled his cup with wine again and greedily drank it down; then, as before, he clanged his cup on the table. His clouded gaze flared up once again.

'Ha! Live and let live,' he cried. 'What's done is done! Fill my cup, fill it again, keep refilling my heavy cup so that my turbulent head is cut from its shoulders, and my soul goes numb! Put me to sleep for the long night that has no morning, and take my consciousness away for ever. What's drunk is finished with and

gone! The merchant's goods have grown rotten from lying around too long, he's giving them away for nothing! He shouldn't have been so stupid as to sell them for less than they were worth, he should have spilt the blood of his enemies, the blood of the innocent, and made that buyer lay down his lost soul into the bargain! Fill my cup, fill it for me again, Katerina!...'

But his hand, with the cup in it, seemed to grow paralysed and stopped moving; he was breathing heavily and with difficulty, his head involuntarily sagging. One final time he fixed his dim gaze on Ordynov, but this, too, faded at last, and his eyelids fell as though they were made of lead. A deathly pallor spread over his face... His lips continued to move and twitch for some time, as though they were trying to say something – and suddenly a tear, hot and large, swelled on his eyelashes, broke free and slowly rolled down his pale cheek... Ordynov could contain himself no longer. He got up, took a staggering step forward to Katerina, and seized her by the hand; but she did not even glance at him, as though she had not noticed him or did not recognize him...

She, too, seemed to have lost consciousness, as though a single thought, a single fixed idea had taken a complete hold of her. She pressed herself close to the sleeping old man, let her white arm snake around his neck and gazed at him with eyes that burned and were inflamed, seemingly riveted to him. She seemed not to notice when Ordynov took her by the hand. At last she turned her head towards him and gave him a long, penetrating look. It seemed that at last she had understood him, and an astonished smile of almost physical pain forced itself on to her lips...

'Go, go away,' she whispered. 'You're drunk and full of bad blood! You are no guest of mine!...' Here she again turned to the old man and fastened her eyes upon him a second time.

She seemed to be watching over every breath he took, and nurturing his sleep with her gaze. She herself seemed afraid to breathe, holding in check the seething eruption of her heart. And so much frenzied devotion did that heart contain that Ordynov's soul was instantly seized by despair, rabid fury and inexhaustible, envious spite.

'Katerina! Katerina!' he cried, gripping her hand as in a vice.

A spasm of pain traversed her face; again she raised her head and looked at him so mockingly, so contemptuously and brazenly that he could barely remain standing. Then she pointed towards the sleeping old man and – as though all his enemy's mockery had transferred itself into her eyes – again glanced at Ordynov with a look that tormented him and turned him to ice.

‘What’s wrong? Does he want to slit my throat, is that it?’ said Ordynov, beside himself with fury.

A demon seemed to whisper in his ear, telling him he had understood her meaning... His heart erupted in laughter at the idea that was evidently fixed in Katerina's mind.

‘I will buy you from your merchant, my beautiful girl, if you want my soul! He won't slit my throat, don't worry!...’

A frozen laugh, which numbed Ordynov's entire being, was fixed on Katerina's features. Its infinite mockery tore his heart asunder. Beside himself, almost unconscious of what he was doing, he reached across the wall and took down from its nail the old man's precious, antique dagger. Katerina's face seemed to express amazement; but simultaneously, for the first time with such vehemence, her eyes also seemed to display contempt and malice. As he looked at her, Ordynov began to feel faint... He felt as though someone was pulling, urging his bewildered arm to commit an act of madness; he unsheathed the dagger... Katerina watched him motionlessly, seeming to breathe no longer...

He glanced at the old man...

Just then it seemed to him that one of the old man's eyes slowly opened and looked at him, laughing. Their gazes met. Ordynov stared at him fixedly for several minutes... Suddenly he had the impression that the old man's face had broken into a laugh all over, and that a diabolical, icy, hope-destroying cackle detonated in the room. A hideous black thought slithered like a serpent into his brain. He shuddered; the dagger fell from his hands and landed with a clang on the floor. Katerina screamed, as though she had woken from oblivion, from a nightmare, from some terrible, fixed hallucination... Pale-featured, the old man slowly got up from the bed and, with hatred in his eyes, kicked the dagger into a corner of the room. Katerina stood deadly pale and motionless; her eyes were

closing; a dull, unbearable agony was forcing itself in convulsions across her face; she hid her face in her hands and with a soul-rending cry fell practically lifeless at the old man's feet...

'Alyosha! Alyosha!' were the words that escaped from her beleaguered breast...

The old man grasped her in his powerful arms, almost crushing her against him. But as she hid her face at his heart, every feature of the old man's face laughed with such naked, shameless mirth that a shock of horror passed through Ordynov's entire being. Deceit, calculation, cold, jealous tyranny and horror at her poor, broken heart – that was what he heard in that shameless laugh, which no longer bothered to conceal itself...

III

When at about eight o'clock the following morning Ordynov, pale and alarmed, and not yet recovered from the previous day's anxieties, opened the door to the abode of Yaroslav Ilyich, whom he had come to see for some reason of which he was not sure, he started back in amazement at the sight of Murin in the room, and stood as though rooted to the threshold. The old man was even paler than Ordynov and, it appeared, could hardly stand up, he was so ill; he was, however, unwilling to sit down, notwithstanding all the exhortations of Yaroslav Ilyich, who was perfectly delighted to receive such a visit, to do so. Yaroslav Ilyich was also astonished to see Ordynov, and gave a cry of delight, but almost at that very moment his rapture passed away and he was suddenly overtaken by a kind of embarrassment, completely unawares, halfway between the table and a chair that stood near it. It was obvious that he did not know what to say or do, and that he fully recognized the impropriety of sucking his chibouk at such a troublesome moment, when he had neglected his visitor, leaving him to his own devices; such, however, was his confusion that he continued to puff at the chibouk all the same, as hard as he was able and even with a

certain degree of inspiration. At last Ordynov entered the room. He cast a cursory glance at Murin. Something resembling the previous day's malicious smile, which even now reduced Ordynov to trembling indignation, crept across the old man's face. All the hostility in that smile was at once, however, smoothed out; it disappeared, and his face assumed a most reserved and inaccessible expression. He made his lodger an extremely low bow... This entire scene finally resurrected Ordynov's consciousness. He looked fixedly at Yaroslav Ilyich, trying to work out what was going on. Yaroslav Ilyich began to fuss and flutter.

'Come in, come in,' he said, at last. 'Come in, most dearly esteemed Vasily Mikhailovich, favour us with your presence and set your stamp... on all these ordinary objects...' said Yaroslav Ilyich, designating with his arm one corner of the room, blushing red as a beetroot, confused and deeply concerned because his most noble-sounding sentence had not come out as he had wanted it to, and thunderously dragged the chair into its very middle.

'I don't want to disturb you, Yaroslav Ilyich, I just wanted to see you... for a couple of minutes.'

'Please! How could you possibly disturb me... Vasily Mikhailovich? But – allow me to offer you some tea! Hey! Servant!...' Turning to Murin, he said: 'I am sure that not even you will say no to a glass!'

Murin nodded, to indicate that he certainly would not.

Yaroslav Ilyich shouted to the servant who had entered the room, demanding in the sternest fashion that another three glasses be brought, and then sat down beside Ordynov. For some time he kept moving his head back and forth like a plaster kitten,* now to the right, now to the left, from Murin to Ordynov and from Ordynov to Murin. It was rather an awkward position for him to be in. He evidently wanted to say something about a subject he considered to be a rather delicate one for at least one of the parties concerned. But try as he might he was totally unable to get a word out... Ordynov also seemed to be at a loss. At one point they both began to speak at the same time... The taciturn Murin, who was observing them with curiosity, slowly opened his mouth, showing every single one of his teeth...

‘I’ve come to tell you,’ Ordynov suddenly began, ‘that because of a most unpleasant incident I’ve been compelled to leave my lodgings, and...’

‘Just imagine, what a strange thing to happen!’ Yaroslav Ilyich said suddenly, interrupting. ‘I must admit that I was positively bowled over when this venerable old man informed me this morning of your decision. But...’

‘He told you?’ Ordynov asked in amazement, looking at Murin.

Murin smoothed his beard and laughed into his sleeve.

‘Yes,’ Yaroslav Ilyich continued. ‘Though of course, I may still be mistaken. But I will tell you this – I vouch on my honour that this venerable old man had not a bad word to say about you!’

Here Yaroslav Ilyich blushed and managed to suppress his agitation only with an effort. Murin, who looked as though he had finally had all the entertainment there was to be had from observing the discomfiture of visitor and householder, took one step forward.

‘What I want to say is this, your honour,’ he began, courteously bowing to Ordynov. ‘His honour has taken the liberty of giving himself a little trouble on your account... The way it’s worked out, sir, well – you know it yourself – we, the mistress and I, that is, we’d have been right glad to have you, and we’d never have dared to say a word... but you know the sort of living I’ve got, sir, you’ve seen it for yourself! To be honest, sir, the Lord only just keeps us alive, for which we truly thank Him; and if it weren’t for Him, well, you can see for yourself, sir, there wouldn’t be much left for me to do except howl to the heavens, would there?’

Here Murin again wiped his beard with his sleeve.

Ordynov almost felt an attack of his old trouble coming on.

‘Yes, yes, I myself told you about him: he’s ill, that’s to say he suffers from *malheur*... I was going to carry on in French, but you must forgive me, my French is a little rusty, that’s to say...’

‘Yes?’

‘Yes, that’s to say...’

Ordynov and Yaroslav Ilyich bowed slightly to each other

without rising from where they sat, and at a slight angle; both covered then-embarrassment with apologetic laughter. The level-headed Yaroslav Ilyich straightened up immediately.

‘Actually, I’ve questioned this honest chap pretty thoroughly,’ he began. ‘He told me that the illness of this woman...’

Here the ever-delicate Yaroslav Ilyich, no doubt wishing to conceal a minor trace of embarrassment which had reappeared on his features, turned a swift, questioning glance in Murin’s direction.

‘Yes, of our young lady...’

The tactful Yaroslav Ilyich did not press his enquiry.

‘Of the young lady, that is, of your former landlady, whom I must admit I haven’t...’ well, yes! The fact is, you see, she’s a sick woman. He says she’s getting in your way... in the way of your studies, and he himself... there’s one important thing you didn’t tell me about, Vasily Mikhailovich!’

‘What’s that?’

‘The gun, dear chap,’ Yaroslav Ilyich practically whispered in the most indulgent tone of voice, with perhaps one millionth part of reproach softly ringing in his cordial tenor. ‘But,’ he added quickly, ‘I know all about it, he gave me an account of what happened – you acted nobly in turning a blind eye to the whole business, he didn’t know what he was doing. In fact, I’ll swear I saw tears in his eyes as he told me about it.’

Again, Yaroslav Ilyich blushed; his eyes lit up, and he moved in his chair with emotion.

‘I, that’s to say, we, your honour, sir, that’s to say, I, in a manner of speaking, and my mistress, we shall pray for you,’ Murin began, turning to Ordynov and staring fixedly at him, while Yaroslav Ilyich made an effort to overcome his customary agitation. ‘Yes, sir, as you yourself know, she’s a silly, ailing woman; and as for me, my legs will hardly carry me...’

‘But I’m prepared to move out,’ Ordynov said impatiently. ‘Enough, I beg you; I’ll go this very instant!...’

‘Oh, sir, we are not in any way displeased with Your Grace.’ (Murin made a very deep bow.) ‘No, sir, that is not what I meant;

what I wanted to tell you is that – well, you see, sir, she’s practically one of my own family, or rather, that is, from a far-off branch of it, ‘from the seventh water’ as they say, please don’t laugh at our common speech, sir, we’re dark folk – and she’s been that way ever since she was a little child. A lively, mischievous little soul, she grew up in the forest like a muzhik’s daughter, surrounded by barge haulers and mill-owners – but then their house burnt down; her mother lost her life in the fire, and so did her father – if you ask her she’ll tell you heaven only knows what... I don’t interfere in all that, but she was examined in Moscow by the Chir-chir-chirurgical Council... in short, sir, she went completely wrong in the head, that’s what! I’m all she has left, and she lives with me. We do our best to get by, we say our prayers, place our trust in the Almighty; I never cross her in anything now...’

Ordynov’s facial expression had changed. Yaroslav Ilyich looked now at one, now at the other.

‘But that’s not what I’m trying to get at, sir... no!’ Murin said, shaking his head solemnly. ‘She’s such a flighty one, if you take my meaning, a real whirlwind, such a passionate, stormy creature, always on the lookout for a lover – if you’ll pardon the expression – and a sweetheart: she’s really obsessed with that. I try to cajole her with stories, but it doesn’t really work. You see, sir, I couldn’t help noticing how she – please excuse my silly talk,’ Murin went on, bowing and wiping his beard with his sleeve – ‘after a manner of speaking, made friends with you; that’s to say, after a manner of speaking, Your Excellency, how you were desirous of cleaving to her with regard to the matter of love...’

Yaroslav Ilyich turned bright red and gave Murin a reproachful look. Ordynov nearly leapt out of his seat.

‘No... that’s to say, sir, that’s not really what I’m driving at... Sir, I’m just an ordinary muzhik, you can do with me as you will... of course, we’re dark folk, we’re just your servants, sir,’ he said, bowing low, ‘and how we shall pray for Your Grace, me and my wife!... What do we require? As long as we have our health and enough to eat, we don’t grumble; but what am I to do, sir, put my head in the noose? You know yourself how it is, sir., it’s just the way things are, don’t be too hard on us, but think of what it would be like if she had a lover, too!... Please forgive me for using such a

coarse word, sir... I'm a muzhik, sir, but you, master... you, Your Excellency, sir, are a young man, proud and hot-blooded, while she, sir, you know it yourself, is just a little child without much sense – it wouldn't be long before she fell into sin! She's a charming, rosy, buxom lass, but I'm an old man, and am constantly plagued by infirmity. Well, what of it? The devil must simply have led Your Grace astray! I try to cajole her along with stories, Lord how I try! And how we shall pray for Your Grace, me and my wife, sir! How we shall pray! And anyway, what would you be wanting with her, Your Excellency, even if she is pretty? She's just a muzhik's daughter, an unwashed peasant woman, a stupid skirt, a match for my muzhik self! A man of your position wouldn't want to go hobnobbing with muzhik girls, would you, now, master? But how she and I will pray for Your Grace, Lord, how we'll pray!...

Here Murin made his lowest bow yet, and for a long time remained bent double, incessantly wiping his beard with his sleeve. Yaroslav Ilyich did not know where to look.

'Yes, this good man,' he observed, in utter embarrassment, 'has told me about certain disorderly incidents he says took place between you; I do not presume to believe it, Vasily Mikhailovich... I heard you were still unwell,' he added quickly, with tears of excitement in his eyes, looking at Ordynov in total confusion.

'Yes... How much do I owe you?' Ordynov asked Murin, quickly.

'What can you be thinking of, master? Enough! We are no sellers of Christ. What can you be thinking of, sir – you offend us! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir; have my spouse and I done anything to offend you? For pity's sake, sir!'

'After all, this is a bit strange, old chap,' said Yaroslav Ilyich, intervening. 'Don't you feel you're offending him by asking him to leave?' he went on, evidently considering it his duty to point out to Murin the full oddity and tactlessness of his behaviour.

'For pity's sake, sir! What can you be thinking of, master, sir? For pity's sake! What have we not done to please your honour? We've tried and tried, sweated our guts out, for pity's sake, sir! Enough, sir; enough, dear master. May Christ have mercy on you! Do you think we're some kind of unbelievers? You could have stayed, eaten our muzhik fare, slept in that room, and we wouldn't

have said anything, no... not a word; but the unclean one led you astray, I'm a sick man and my wife is, also – what can you do? There would have been no one to wait upon you, but we would have been glad to, heartily glad to. And how we shall pray for Your Grace, oh, how we shall pray!

Murin bowed from the waist. A tear forced itself from one of Yaroslav Ilyich's enraptured eyes. He gazed at Ordynov with enthusiasm.

'I say, what a noble trait, don't you agree? What sacred hospitality lies invested in the Russian people!'

Ordynov glanced wildly at Yaroslav Ilyich. He felt a sense of something that was almost horror... and looked him up and down from head to toe.

'That's true, sir, we do indeed honour hospitality, oh, how we honour it, sir!' said Murin, taking up the conversation and concealing his beard with the whole of his sleeve. 'To be sure, the thought now occurs to me: you could have been our guest for a while, sir, honest to God you could,' he continued, going up to Ordynov, 'and I'd have said nothing, sir; from one day to the next, as God's my witness, I'd have said nothing at all. But sin was leading you grievously astray, and my mistress is not well! Ah, if it weren't for the mistress! Now, if it had just been me on my own: oh, how I'd have served Your Grace, how I'd have looked after you, oh, how I'd have looked after you! Whom should we respect, if not Your Grace? Oh, I'd have cured you, cured you well and truly, I know the right remedy, too... Truly, sir, you could have been our guest, honest to God, there's a fine expression, been our guest, you could have!...'

'Yes, indeed, is there not some remedy... ?' Yaroslav Ilyich observed, but did not complete his sentence.

Ordynov had not really been fair to Yaroslav Ilyich when a short time earlier he had surveyed the latter from head to toe in wild amazement. Yaroslav Ilyich was, of course, a most honest and noble individual, but now he understood everything, and it had to be admitted that his situation was exceedingly perplexing. He felt like bursting with laughter, as they say. Had he been alone with Ordynov – two such friends – Yaroslav Ilyich would not, of course,

have been able to contain himself and would have abandoned himself to an immoderate bout of mirth. He would, however, have done this in a thoroughly noble manner, and once he had stopped laughing would have shaken Ordynov's hand with feeling, assuring him devoutly and sincerely that his respect for him had increased twofold and that he thoroughly excused him... and would not, of course, have even mentioned his youth. But now, for all his tactfulness, Yaroslav Ilyich found himself in an exceedingly perplexing situation and scarcely knew where to turn...

'What I mean by remedies is drugs!' retorted Murin, whose face had been sent into rapid activity by Yaroslav Ilyich's awkward exclamation. 'You know, sir, what I, in my muzhik stupidity, would say is this,' he went on, taking a step forward. 'You've read an awful lot of books, sir; I'd say you'd gotten to be awful clever; or, as we muzhiks say in Russian: your mind's gone ahead of your reason...'

'That's enough!' Yaroslav Ilyich said, breaking in sternly.

'I'm going,' said Ordynov. 'Thank you, Yaroslav Ilyich; I'll come again, I shall certainly come again,' he said in reply to the redoubled flow of civilities that came from Yaroslav Ilyich, who was able to detain him no longer. 'Goodbye, goodbye...'

'Goodbye, Your Honour; goodbye, sir; don't forget us, come and visit us sinners.'

Ordynov was no longer within earshot; he had made his exit like one half out of his mind.

He could tolerate no more; he was like a man whose spirit has been crushed; his consciousness was growing torpid. He had an obscure sense that his illness was suffocating him, but cold despair had settled in his soul, and all he could feel was a dull pain that cudgelled him, tormented him and sucked his breast with its fangs. At that moment he wanted to die. His legs gave way under him, and he sat down by the fence, taking no notice either of passers-by or of the curious crowd that had begun to form around him, calling to him and plying him with questions. But suddenly, in the multitude of voices, he heard above him the familiar intonations of Murin. Ordynov raised his head. The old man was indeed standing in front of him; his pale features were solemn and reflective. This was a completely different person from the one who had mocked at him

so vulgarly in Yaroslav Ilyich's apartment. Ordynov rose to his feet; Murin took him by the arm and led him away from the crowd...

'You'll be wanting to collect your things,' he said, giving Ordynov a sideways look. 'Don't be downhearted, master!' he exclaimed. 'You're young – why be downhearted?'

Ordynov made no reply.

'Are you offended, master? You seem awfully angry... but you've no need to be; every man cherishes his own, every man looks after what is his.'

'I don't know you,' Ordynov said, 'and I don't want to know your secrets. But she, she!...' he said, and the tears came flooding from his eyes in rivulets. One by one the wind blew them from his cheeks... Ordynov wiped them with his hand. This gesture, together with his gaze and the involuntary movements of his quivering, blue lips, bore the unmistakable signs of approaching madness.

'I told you before,' said Murin, frowning intensely. 'She's half crazy! Why should you need to know what made her like that, or how she lost her wits? It's just the way she is – and she's dear to me! I love her more than my own life and I'll never surrender her to any other man. Now do you understand?'

For a moment a light flared in Ordynov's eyes.

'But then why... why do I feel now as though I had lost my own life? Why does my heart ache? Why did I become intimate with Katerina?'

'Why?' Murin smiled ironically and thought for a bit. 'Why? I don't know why,' he ventured at last. 'Woman's nature is not the sea's abyss, it can be fathomed, but it's cunning, determined and tenacious. What she wants she must have instantly. If you must know, master, she wanted to leave me for you,' he went on, musing. 'She was sick of the old man, she'd put up with all she was going to put up with from him. You seem to have really caught her fancy to begin with! Though if it hadn't been you, it'd have been another... I cross her in nothing, you see – if she wants bird's milk I get her bird's milk; if there's no bird that will give milk, I'll invent one for her! She's vain! She goes her own sweet way, yet she doesn't even know herself what her heart is hankering after. So finally she decided that things were better the way they were. Oh, master,

you're awfully young! Your heart's still as passionate as that of a maiden wiping her tears away with her sleeve because she's been forsaken! You know, master, a weak man cannot control himself on his own. Give him everything, and he'll come of his own accord and give it all back to you; give him half the world, just try it, and what do you think he'll do? He'll hide himself in your shoe immediately, that small will he make himself. Give a weak man freedom and he'll fetter it himself and give it back to you. A foolish heart has no use for freedom! You won't last long with ways like *that*. I'm telling you all this because you're such a baby. What are you to me? You've been and gone – if it hadn't been you it would have been someone else, it's all the same. I knew right at the outset it would be the same old story. But she can't be crossed! You can't contradict her, not if you want to hang on to your peace of mind. I mean, you know what people say, master,' Murin went on, philosophizing now: 'anything can happen! You may grab hold of a knife in irritation, or your enemy, unarmed, may set about you with his bare hands as if you were a sheep and tear open your throat with his teeth. But just let them put the knife in your hand, and let your enemy bare his broad chest before you – and sure as anything you'll step back!'

They entered the yard. The Tatar had spotted Murin a long way off; he doffed his cap to him and gave Ordynov a sly, fixed stare.

'Where's your mother? Is she at home?' Murin shouted to the Tatar.

'Yes.'

'Tell her to give him a hand with his stuff! And as for yourself, be off with you, get moving!'

They climbed the staircase. The old woman who acted as the servant in Murin's household and who really did appear to be the yardkeeper's mother was fussing about with the belongings of the erstwhile lodger and ill-temperedly tying them all into one large bundle.

'Wait; I'll go and get something else that belongs to you, it's still in there...'

Murin went off to the bedroom. A moment later he returned and presented Ordynov with an expensive pillow, embroidered all over

with silk and worsted – the very same pillow which Katerina had placed under his head when he had been taken ill.

‘She sends you this,’ Murin said. ‘And now off you go, and mind you don’t loiter on the way,’ he added in a fatherly undertone, ‘or you’ll be sorry you did.’

It was clear that he did not wish to offend his lodger. But as he threw him a final glance, it was impossible not to observe the surge of intense hostility that erupted on to his features. He closed the door on Ordynov with something that was almost loathing.

Two hours later Ordynov moved into the apartment of the German, Spiess. When Tinchén saw him, she gasped. She at once questioned him about his health and, having learnt what the trouble was, at once set about treating it. With some satisfaction the old German pointed out to his lodger the fact that he had just been about to go down and stick a new advertisement to the gate, because today the rent Ordynov had paid in advance had run out, precisely to the last copeck. As he did so, the old man did not lose an opportunity of cautiously praising German honesty and punctuality. On that very same day Ordynov was taken ill, and it was three months before he was able to get up again.

Little by little he recovered and began to go out once more. Life in the German’s apartment was peaceful and monotonous. The German had no particular temperament to speak of: the pretty Tinchén, morality apart, was everything that could have been desired – but life seemed to have for ever lost its attraction for Ordynov. He had become broody and irritable; his sensitivity to impressions took on a morbid aspect, and he sank imperceptibly into a malignant, callous hypochondria. His books sometimes lay unopened for whole weeks on end. His future was closed, his money was running out and he had lost heart prematurely; he was not even thinking about the future. Occasionally his former passion for learning, his previous zeal, the old shapes he had himself created rose vividly before him out of the past, but they merely stifled and strangled his energy. His thoughts were not being translated into action. His creativity had run dry. All these shapes seemed to have grown into giants in his imaginings with the sole purpose of mocking the impotence of him, their creator. At moments of sadness he found himself comparing himself to the sorcerer’s

boastful apprentice who, having stolen his master's secret, ordered the broom to carry the water and ended up drowning in it, as he had forgotten how to say 'stop'. Perhaps a whole, original, distinctive idea would have manifested itself within him. Perhaps he had been destined to be an artist of learning. He at least had once believed so. Faith like that was a pledge for the future. But now at odd moments he found himself laughing at his blind conviction – and remained where he was.

Some six months earlier he had conceived, created and set down on paper the sketch of a work to which (because of his youth) he had in moments of creative infertility pinned the most substantial hopes. This work concerned the history of the Church, and into it he had poured his warmest, most fervent convictions. Now he read through the plan he had made, revised it somewhat, thought about it, read around it, dug in his references, and finally rejected his idea, without building anything on its ruins. But something resembling mysticism, a belief in predestination and the obscure began to seep its way into his soul. The unhappy man felt his sufferings, and prayed God for deliverance. The German's housemaid, a God-fearing old Russian woman, would relate with satisfaction how her quiet lodger occupied himself in prayer, and how for whole hours on end he would lie like a lifeless corpse on the church's floor...

He never said a word to anyone about what had happened to him. But from time to time, especially at dusk, at the hour when the clamour of the church bells would remind him of the moment when his entire body had first trembled and ached with an emotion hitherto unknown to him, when he had knelt beside her in the church, oblivious of everything, aware only of the beating of her timid heart, when with tears of joy and ecstasy he had greeted the new, bright hope that had flashed towards him in his lonely life – then a storm would arise in his for ever wounded soul. Then his spirit would shudder and the agony of love would once again flare up like a scorching blaze within his bosom. Then his heart would ache mournfully and passionately, and his love grow stronger together with his sadness. Often he would sit for whole hours on end in the same spot, having forgotten himself and his day-to-day existence, having forgotten everything in the world, lonely and downcast; he would shake his head in despair and, as he shed silent

tears, whisper to himself: 'Katerina! My sweet dove! My only sister!...'

A hideous thought began increasingly to torment him. It pursued him more and more insistently, and with each day it appeared to him more probable, more actual. It seemed to him – and he ended by believing this totally – that Katerina was of perfectly sound mind, but that in his own way Murin had been right when he had called her a 'weak heart'. It seemed to him that some mystery bound her to the old man, and that she, though ignorant of any crime and as pure as a dove, had somehow fallen into his power. Who were they, the two of them? He did not know. But in his mind's eye he kept envisaging a deep, desperate tyranny over a poor, defenceless creature; and his heart grew troubled and quivered with impotent indignation within his breast. It seemed to him that the frightened eyes of her suddenly awakened soul had been insidiously presented with the notion of its downfall, her poor, 'weak' heart subjected to insidious torture, the truth gratuitously distorted to her; that she had been intentionally kept in the dark when necessary, that the inexperienced susceptibilities of her impetuous, troubled heart had been exposed to cunning flattery, and that little by little the wings of her free, untrammelled soul had been clipped, until finally it was incapable either of rebellion or of an unconstrained break through into real life...

Little by little Ordynov grew even more withdrawn than he had been previously, a tendency in which, to be fair to them, the Germans did nothing to hinder him. He often liked to wander about the streets, for a long time, and without purpose. He selected by preference for his walks the hour of twilight, and the places he visited during them were godforsaken, remote ones, seldom frequented by ordinary people. It was in one such back street that, one wet, insalubrious spring evening, he ran across Yaroslav Ilyich.

Yaroslav Ilyich had grown noticeably thinner; his pleasant eyes had lost their twinkle, and he looked thoroughly disillusioned. He was hurrying about some business that would brook no delay, was soaked through and covered in mud-stains, and in what was almost a touch of the bizarre, a raindrop clung, where it had clung all evening, to his highly decorous, but now blue-tinged, nose. He had, what was more, grown sidewhiskers.* These, and the fact that Yaroslav Ilyich looked as though he wanted to avoid meeting his

old friend, produced an effect on Ordynov that was almost one of shock... It was a remarkable thing, but it even wounded and offended his heart, which until that moment had not required anyone's compassion. In the end, he decided that he found the old Yaroslav Ilyich more to his liking – a simple, goodhearted, naïve fellow, a man who was, if one were to be quite frank, a little stupid, but who had no pretensions to disillusionment or wisdom. It is never pleasant when a *stupid* person, of whom we have previously been fond perhaps because of his very stupidity, *suddenly acquires some wisdom*, no, it is never pleasant. Even so, the distrust with which he looked at Ordynov was immediately smoothed from his features. For all his disillusionment, he had not lost his native obduracy, which, as is well known, a man takes to the grave with him, and he began to worm himself with pleasure into Ordynov's confidence and favour. He began by announcing that he was very busy, and then remarked that it was a long time since they had seen each other; suddenly, however, the conversation took a rather strange turn. Yaroslav Ilyich proceeded to speak of the mendacity of people in general, of the flimsiness of the blessings of this world, of *vanitas vanitatis*; in passing, with something even less than indifference, he did not lose an opportunity of mentioning Pushkin, talked of his acquaintances with a certain degree of cynicism and in conclusion even hinted at the perfidy and falsehood of those who call themselves friends, though true friendship has not existed in the world since the day it began. In short, Yaroslav Ilyich had acquired some wisdom. Ordynov did not say a word to contradict him, but he began to feel unspeakably, agonizingly sad: it was as though he had buried his best friend!

‘Ah, just fancy, I nearly forgot to tell you,’ said Yaroslav Ilyich suddenly, as though he had just remembered something very interesting. ‘I have some news! I shall tell you it in confidence. You remember that house where you were living?’

Ordynov started and grew pale.

‘Well, just imagine, not long ago a whole gang of thieves was discovered in that house; what I mean, my good sir, is a nest of brigands, a robbers’ den; contrabandists, rogues of all kinds, heaven only knows! They caught some of them, the others were still on the run; the strictest instructions have been issued. And can you believe this? You remember the owner of the house, that God-fearing,

venerable, noble-looking old man?...'

'Why, yes.'

'Tell me after this your opinion of mankind! He was the head of the entire gang, their ringleader! Isn't that absurd?'

Yaroslav Ilyich spoke with feeling, condemning the whole of mankind because of one of its representatives, for Yaroslav Ilyich could do no other – it was in his character.

'But what about the others? What about Murin?' Ordynov asked in a whisper.

'Ah, Murin, Murin! No, he is a venerable old man, a noble fellow. But, now that you mention it, that does throw a new light...'

'What? Are you telling me that he, too, was in the gang?'

Ordynov's heart was nearly bursting out of him with impatient...

'Well, as you say...' Yaroslav Ilyich added, fixing his leaden eyes on Ordynov – a sign that he was thinking – 'Murin couldn't have been one of them. Exactly three weeks ago he left for his village with his wife... The yardkeeper told me... that little Tatar fellow, you remember?'

MR PROKHARCHIN*



A STORY

In the darkest and most modest corner of Ustinya Fyodorovna's apartment dwelling lived a man of advancing years, a decent-thinking teetotaler by the name of Semyon Ivanovich Prokharchin. As Mr Prokharchin, who occupied only a minor position in the service, received a salary that was thoroughly commensurate with his professional aptitude, it would have been unreasonable for Ustinya Fyodorovna to expect more from him than the five rubles a month he paid her in rent. Some people even said that in this arrangement her own private considerations played a part; but, as though to confound all those who talked behind his back, Mr Prokharchin became her favourite, this distinction being interpreted in a decent and honourable sense. It should be observed that Ustinya Fyodorovna, a most estimable and amply proportioned woman, who had an especial liking for fatty foods and coffee and who held out during the fasts only with difficulty, maintained in her household several lodgers who paid twice the rent she charged Semyon Ivanovich, yet being, every one of them, not of the quiet sort but, on the contrary, 'wicked mockers' of her womanly endeavours and defenceless isolation, they had sunk very low in her esteem; indeed, had it not been for the money they paid her in return for their lodging, not only would she have refused to let them live in her apartment – she would not even have let them in the door. Semyon Ivanovich had been her favourite from the day a certain retired or perhaps, more accurately, dismissed individual with a partiality for strong drink had been carried off to Volkovo Cemetery. Though the dismissed and partial gentleman had gone around with a permanent black eye received, in his own words, for bravery and had had the use of only one leg, the other having been lost in some way also associated with bravery, he had nevertheless known how to win and take advantage of all the kind favours of which Ustinya Fyodorovna had been capable, and would probably have continued to live as her most faithful myrmidon and hanger-on for many years to come, had he not finally overindulged his drinking habit in a most crass and lamentable manner. This had happened back in Peski,* at a time when Ustinya Fyodorovna had only had three lodgers, of whom, now that she had moved into a new apartment where everything was run on a grander scale and she took in approximately a dozen new lodgers, Mr Prokharchin was the sole remaining one.

Whether it was that Mr Prokharchin possessed certain inherent

deficiencies, or whether it was that each and every one of his fellow boarders possessed them, things seemed not to go smoothly on either side right from the very start. Let us observe here that all Ustinya Fyodorovna's new lodgers got along together like brothers; some of them worked in the same department; on the first day of each month they all of them in turn lost their salaries to one another at banco, preference and billiards; they liked to spend a happy hour all together in a throng, enjoying life's sparkling moments, as they put it; they also sometimes liked to talk about lofty matters, and although in the last instance things seldom passed off without a dispute, since prejudices were banished from the entire company, mutual agreement was on such occasions invariably preserved. The most note-worthy of the lodgers were Mark Ivanovich, a clever and well-read man; then a tenant named Oplevaniyev; then one named Prepolo-venko, also a good, modest fellow; then one Zinoviy Prokofyevich, who had made it his aim in life to enter high society; then the copying-clerk Okeanov, who had in his time nearly succeeded in wresting the palm of number one and favourite from Semyon Ivanovich; another clerk by the name of Sudbin; the *reznobinets* Kanta-rev;* and several others besides. Semyon Ivanovich did not, however, seem one of them. To be sure, no one wished him any harm, especially since they had all from the very outset rendered Prokharchin his due and had decided, in the words of Mark Ivanovich, that he, Prokharchin, was a good and self-effacing fellow, not a man of the world, but reliable and devoid of flattery; a man not without his deficiencies, of course, but one who, if he ever suffered, could ascribe it to nothing other than his own deficiency of imagination. Not was this all: lacking in any imagination of his own, Mr Prokharchin could never have hoped to make a particularly advantageous impression on anyone by, for example, his appearance or his manners (a favourite target of those who are out to mock), and yet his appearance did not count against him, just as though everything were perfectly normal; and indeed, Mark Ivanovich, being a clever man, conducted a formal defence of Semyon Ivanovich, declaring in grand and flowery terms that Prokharchin was a respectable old fellow who had long ago said farewell to the elegies of his youth. Consequently, if Semyon Ivanovich was unable to get along with the others, it must have been solely his own fault.

The first thing that caught their attention was, unquestionably,

Semyon Ivanovich's stinginess and excessive thrift. This was at once observed and taken note of, for Semyon Ivanovich would never under any circumstances or no whatever pretext lend anyone his teapot even for the very shortest space of time; and what made this all the more unfair of him was that he himself very rarely drank tea, but when the need arose imbibed a rather pleasant infusion of wild flowers and certain medicinal grasses, of which he always kept a plentiful supply. He also ate in a fashion that was completely different from the other lodgers. Never, for example, would he permit himself to consume the whole of the dinner that was provided each day by Ustinya Fyodorovna for his fellow boarders. The dinner cost half a ruble; Semyon Ivanovich spent only twenty-five copecks in copper and never any more than that, and so took either one helping of *shchi* *or one helping of beef; most often, however, he had neither *shchi* nor beef, but made do with a few slices of white bread garnished with onion, cottage cheese, pickled cucumber or other condiments, which was far less expensive, and only returned to his half dinner when he could stand such fare no longer...

Here the biographer must confess that not for anything in the world would he have taken it into his head to speak of such base, unworthy and positively embarrassing details, which some lovers of the noble style may even find offensive, were it not for the fact that these details illustrate a particular trait, a central feature in the character of the hero of this narrative; for Mr Prokharchin was far from being so poor that he could not afford to eat regular and adequate meals, but acted in a way as to suggest the contrary, without fear of disgrace or common gossip, and merely to satisfy his peculiar whims, out of miserliness and excessive caution – a state of affairs that will become more clearly evident in what follows. We shall, however, take care not to bore the reader with a description of all Semyon Ivanovich's caprices and shall not only omit, for example, the curious and for the reader highly amusing description of his mode of dress, but shall even, with the exception of Ustinya Fyodorovna's own testimony to the fact that it was so, refrain from mentioning that throughout his entire life Semyon Ivanovich could not bring himself to send his linen to be washed or, if he ever could, did it so rarely that in the intervals it would have been perfectly possible to forget the presence of linen on Semyon Ivanovich. From the landlady's testimony it appeared that Semyon Ivanovich, bless

his soul, poor lamb, festered away in that corner of his for twenty years, not that he had any shame, for during all the days of his sojourn upon earth he was a persistent stranger to socks, handkerchiefs and other such things'; aided by the decrepitude of the folding screen, Ustinya Fyodorovna had actually seen with her own eyes that 'the poor dear sometimes had nothing to cover his white little body with'. Rumours of this kind went round after Semyon Ivanovich's death. During his lifetime, however (and here lay one of the major sources of dissension), he could not bear it if anyone, even on the most agreeable of comradely pretexts, poked his inquisitive nose into his corner unasked, even if it were only because the screen was so decrepit. He was a thoroughly intractable person, a man of few words who had no time for small talk. He was not fond of those who proffered advice, and was merciless towards upstarts; he would upbraid those who mocked at him, tried to give him advice or push themselves forward right there and then on the spot, put them to shame, and have done with it. 'You are an insolent jackanapes, you are an idle whistler, who are you to come offering me advice; mind your own business, sir, you're a jackanapes and you'd do better to set your own house in order, that's what!' Semyon Ivanovich was a straightforward man, and he had absolutely no qualms about addressing everyone with the 'thou' form. He could not endure it, either, if anyone familiar with his habitual ways began pestering him out of sheer mischief, asking him what he kept in his trunk... Semyon Ivanovich had a small trunk. It stood underneath his bed, and he guarded it like the apple of his eye; and although everyone knew that it really contained nothing apart from some old rags, two or three pairs of worn-out boots and a lot of ill-assorted rubbish and filth, Mr Prokharchin attached a very high value to this property of his, and on one occasion was even heard to express dissatisfaction with the trunk's old, but fairly sound lock and to say that he was going to get another, of some special, German manufacture, with various gadgets and a secret spring. When one day Zinovy Prokofyevich, carried away by youthful cleverness, expressed the thoroughly vulgar and indecent notion that Semyon Ivanovich was probably putting money away in his trunk and keeping it hidden in order to leave it to his descendants, everyone present was fairly stunned by the extraordinary consequences of Zinovy Prokofyevich's improper action. For a start, Mr Prokharchin had to think for a while before

he could find decent language to describe such a shameless and vulgar idea. For a long time words deprived of all meaning poured from his lips, and only gradually could it be ascertained that, in the first instance, Semyon Ivanovich was upbraiding Zinovy Prokofyevich for some niggardly deed of his that had taken place a very long time ago; then it could be discerned that Semyon Ivanovich seemed to be predicting that Zinovy Prokofyevich would never succeed in entering high society, and that the tailor to whom he owed money for his clothes would give him a hiding, nay, would certainly give him a hiding since the jackanapes was taking such a long time to pay up, and that, finally, 'You want to be a cadet in the hussars, you jackanapes, but you won't make the grade, it won't work out the way you think it will, and when the administration gets to hear of it you'll be demoted to the rank of common clerk; that's what I'm telling you, do you hear, you insolent jackanapes?' After that Semyon Ivanovich grew calmer, but, having lain down for five hours, to everyone's extreme astonishment he seemed to get a second wind and, first to himself, and then turning to Zinovy Prokofyevich, began to upbraid him again and put him to shame. But the matter did not end there, and in the evening, when Mark Ivanovich and the lodger Prepolovenko rustled up some tea and invited the copying-clerk Okeanov to share it with them, Semyon Ivanovich left his bed and humorously joined them, contributing his fifteen or twenty copecks and, on the pretext of having suddenly acquired a thirst for a cup of tea, began to expatiate on the matter at great length, explaining that a poor man was simply that, a poor man and nothing more, and that as a poor man he had no means from which he might save. Here Mr Prokharchin even confessed, solely because the subject had come up, that he, a poor man, had the day before yesterday asked Zinovy Prokofyevich, an insolent man, for the loan of a ruble, but that now he would not accept the loan in case the cheeky brat should give himself airs, that that was the way it was, his salary was such that he could not even afford to feed himself; and that, finally, 'as the poor man you see before you', he sent his sister-in-law in Tver the sum of five rubles every month, that if he did not do this his sister-in-law would die, and that if his dependent sister-in-law had died, he, Semyon Ivanovich, would long ago have bought himself some new clothes... And at such length did Semyon Ivanovich expatiate on the subject of the poor man, his rubles and his sister-in-law, repeating the same thing over

and over again in order to make the strongest possible impression on his listeners, that he finally lost his thread completely, fell silent, and only three days later, when no one was even thinking of picking on him and everyone had forgotten about him, added in conclusion something to the effect that when Zinovy Prokofyevich got into the hussars he would have his leg cut off in a war and be given a wooden one in its place, that Zinovy Prokofyevich would come to him saying, 'Give me some bread, Semyon Ivanovich, there's a good man,' but that Semyon Ivanovich would refuse to give Zinovy Prokofyevich any bread, that he would not even look at the ungovernable fellow and would tell him to go to the devil.

All this, as one might have supposed, aroused much curiosity and also a fearful amount of hilarity. Without wasting much time about it, all the landlady's paying guests joined forces in order to pursue the inquiry further and, out of nothing more than sheer inquisitiveness, decided to converge on Semyon Ivanovich once and for all in a gang. And since Mr Prokharchin had, of late – that is to say, ever since the day he had moved in with them – also been very keen on finding out all about them and asking them nosy questions, something he did for reasons that were doubtless private and his own, a mutual relationship was established between the two warring parties, one which required no preliminary effort, but seemed to come about naturally and as if by chance. In order to establish such relationships Semyon Ivanovich always had at the ready a special, rather cunning and highly intricate manoeuvre of his own, which is in part already familiar to the reader: he would leave his bed at around the time for evening tea and, if he saw the others gathering together anywhere in order to prepare the beverage, would go up to them like a modest, intelligent and kindly sort of person, contribute his twenty copecks and declare that he wished to join their company. At that point the young men would exchange winks and, having thus signalled to one another their collusion against Semyon Ivanovich, would strike up a conversation that was initially decorous and proper. Then one of them would rather wittily begin, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, to relate various items of news, which nearly always contained fictitious and entirely improbable material. Thus, for example, he might say that someone had heard His Excellency that day telling Demid Vasilyevich that in his opinion married clerks were more reliable than single ones, and more suitable for

promotion as they were quiet and had their aptitudes considerably enhanced by marriage, and for this reason he, the speaker, wishing to excel and to add to his stature, was striving to be united in wedlock as soon as possible with a certain Fevronya Prokofyevna. Or he might, for example, say that it had more than once been observed of various members of their fraternity that they were entirely lacking in good breeding and correct, pleasant manners, and were therefore unlikely to have any appeal in the society of ladies, and that for this reason, in order to eradicate the said abuse, a deduction should be made from their salaries forthwith, the corporate sum thereby obtained to be used for the furbishing of a hall where they would be given dancing lessons and allowed to acquire all the traits of nobility and good etiquette – politeness, consideration for their elders, strength of character, goodness and appreciativeness of heart, and various pleasant airs and graces. Or again, he might say that there was a plan afoot to make some of the clerks, starting with the very oldest, sit some kind of examination in all subjects,* designed to improve their level of education, as a consequence of which, the speaker would add, the sheep would be divided from the goats and several gentlemen would have to throw in their hands. In short, a thousand of the most absurd rumours belonging to one type or the other were expounded. In order to sustain the illusion, everyone immediately pretended to believe the story; they would show great interest in it, ask questions, consider how it applied to themselves; some of them, assuming mournful expressions, would even begin to shake their heads and seek advice right, left and centre, as though to say: what shall I do if I am found out? It need hardly be added that even a man far less gentle and good-natured than Mr Prokharchin would have become confused and entangled by such a welter of rumour. What is more, from all the evidence it may be concluded beyond any doubt that Semyon Ivanovich was entirely impervious to any idea unfamiliar to his intelligence and that having, forexample, received some piece of news he was invariably compelled to chew it over and digest it, search for its meaning, in order at last, after a process of trial and error, to master it, in a thoroughly peculiar way that was quite special to himself... Thus it was that Semyon Ivanovich suddenly began to reveal a number of curious qualities which hitherto no one had suspected he possessed. Talk and gossip ensued, and the whole affair eventually found its way, with suitable

embellishments, to the office where the clerks pursued their labours. The effect was rendered all the more intense by the fact that Mr Prokharchin, having looked more or less the same for as long as anyone could remember, suddenly changed in physiognomy: his features became restless, his gaze fearful, timid and slightly suspicious; he began to pace about delicately, starting and pricking up his ears and, to complete his newly acquired qualities, he developed a positively ferocious passion for the truth. In the end, he carried this love of truth so far that he even took the risky step of challenging Demid Vasilyevich himself as to the plausibility of the tidings that reached his ears in their dozens every day, and if we remain silent there about the consequences of this singular action on the part of Semyon Ivanovich, it is for no reason other than a sincere concern for his reputation. In the light of this, it was decided he was a misanthrope with a disregard for the conventions of decent society. It was subsequently decided, too, that there was much about him that was fantastical, a perception in no way mistaken, as it was repeatedly observed that Semyon Ivanovich sometimes forgot himself completely: sitting at his desk with his mouth wide open and his pen raised in the air, looking as though he had frozen or been turned to stone, he soon resembled the shadow of a rational being than a rational being proper. It not infrequently happened that some innocently gaping gentleman, having suddenly met his fugitive, lustreless and questing gaze, would be set all-a-tremble, lose his nerve and immediately insert into some high-priority document either a blot or some word that was of no priority at all. The unseemliness of Semyon Ivanovich's behaviour embarrassed and offended people of a truly righteous disposition... What finally dispelled all further doubts as to the fantastical nature of Semyon Ivanovich's mind was the arrival in the office one morning of a rumour that Mr Prokharchin had even given a fright to Demid Vasilyevich himself, for, upon encountering him in the corridor, he had acted so peculiarly and strangely that he had compelled him to retreat... Finally, Semyon Ivanovich's misdemeanour reached his own ears. Learning of it, he at once stood up, carefully made his way between the desks and chairs, attained the vestibule, took his overcoat, put it on, went outside – and disappeared for an indefinite period of time. Whether he had taken fright, or whether he had acted under the prompting of some other influence, we do not know – but for a time he was not to be

found either at home or at the office...

We shall not attempt to explain Semyon Ivanovich's fate simply as a result of his fantastical disposition; on the other hand, however, we cannot refrain from observing to the reader that our hero was an unworldly and thoroughly submissive individual, who until the day he had joined the company of his fellow boarders had lived in obscure, impenetrable solitude, and had been distinguished by his quietness and even a certain mysteriousness; for he had spent the whole of the time he had lived at Peski lying on his bed behind the screen, never saying a word and communicating with no one. Both of his former room-mates had lived in exactly the same way as he: they, too, were somewhat mysterious individuals, and had also spend fifteen years lying behind their screens. In the patriarchal calm the happy, somnolent days had drifted by one after the other, and since everything around them had also followed a smooth and uneventful course neither Semyon Ivanovich nor Ustinya Fyodorovna could even remember exactly when fate had brought them together. 'Oh, it'll be ten years now, no, fifteen, no, twenty-five,' she would sometimes say to her new lodgers, 'since he settled down with me, poor lamb, bless his little soul.' And so it was perfectly natural that the hero of our tale, unused to company, had been most unpleasantly surprised when, just a year earlier, he had suddenly found himself, a staid and modest man, amidst a noisy, restless throng of a dozen young lads, his new room-mates and companions.

Semyon Ivanovich's disappearance caused no end of a stir in the corners. For a start, he was the favourite lodger; then there was the fact that his passport, which had been in the landlady's safekeeping, proved at about this time to have been accidentally mislaid. Ustinya Fyodorovna set up a wail – a device to which she resorted at all times of crisis; for two days she upbraided her lodgers and heaped abuse on them; she wailed that they had driven her lodger away like a chicken, and that 'all those wicked mockers' had been the ruin of him; on the third day she shooed them all out of the house and sent them off to find the fugitive and bring him home at whatever cost, dead or alive. In the evening first copying-clerk Sudbin returned to say that the trail had been found, that he had seen the fugitive in Tolkuchy Market* and other places, had followed him and stood near him but had not dared to speak to

him, though he had even been a near bystander of his in a crowd of people watching a house on fire in Krivoy Lane.* Half an hour later Okeanov and the *raznoch-inets* Kantarev appeared, and confirmed what Sudbin had said word for word: they had also stood not far from Semyon Ivanovich, had passed close to him, only ten paces away from him, but they had not dared to talk to him either; they both remarked that he had been in the company of a drunken beggar. Finally the other lodgers turned up, too, and having heard the others out attentively, decided that Prokharchin could not be fear away and would soon show up; they said, however, that they had all known he was going around with a drunken beggar. The drunken beggar was a thoroughly unpleasant character, unruly and smooth-tongued, and it seemed quite plain that Semyon Ivanovich had somehow been taken in by him. He had appeared, together with their mutual companion Remnev, just a week before Semyon Ivanovich had gone missing, had stayed in the corners for a short while sponging off people, said he was suffering for the sake of truth, that previously he had been a civil servant in the outlying districts, that an inspector general had had itin for them, that he and his companions had been given the sack just for telling the truth, that he had come to St Petersburg and fallen at the feet of Porfiry Grigoryevich, that following Porfiry Grigoryevich's intercession he had found a place in a certain office, but that, through the cruellest stroke of ill-fortune, he had been dismissed from that post too, as the office itself had been closed down as a result of certain alterations; that he had not been accepted into the new, revised staff of clerks, as much on account of his sheer incompetence for the work involved as for his competence in relation to another, completely irrelevant matter – and, in addition, on account of his love of truth, and the machinations of his enemies. When he had finished this story, during the narration of which Mr Zimoveykin several times kissed and embraced his surly and unshaven friend Remnev, he bowed to the feet of each of the people in the room in turn, not even forgetting Avdotya the serving-maid, called them all his benefactors and explained that he was an unworthy, importunate, base, unruly and stupid man, and that good people should not judge his miserable lot and simple nature too severely. Having thus solicited the favour of his listeners, Mr Zimoveykin revealed himself to be a jovial fellow, became the soul of cheerfulness, kissed Ustinya Fyodorovna's hands, in spite of her

modest protestations that her hands were common and not refined, and as the evening drew near promised to demonstrate his talent to the entire company in a remarkable *danse caractéristique*. On the following day, however, his act concluded in a sad dénouement. Whether it was that his dance had been just a shade too characterful, or whether it was that Ustinya Fyodorovna, to use her own words, had felt she had disgraced her and made a fool of her, while she was ‘friendly with Yaroslav Ilyich himself’, and could have, if she had wanted to, long ago become ‘an ober-officer’s wife’ – whatever the reason was, Zimoveykin had to clear off home. He had left, returned again, been ignominiously turfed out a second time, then insinuated himself into Semyon Ivanovich’s attention and good graces, relieved him in passing of his new breeches and had now finally emerged as Semyon Ivanovich’s tempter.

As soon as the landlady was certain that Semyon Ivanovich was alive and well, and that there was now no need to go hunting for his passport, she immediately stopped fretting and began to calm down. At the same time some of the lodgers decided to give the fugitive a royal welcome: they smashed the bolt and removed the screen from around the prodigal’s bed, rumbled up the bedclothes a little, took the famous trunk and placed it at the foot of the bed, and in the bed itself they put an effigy of Mr Prokharchin’s sister-in-law made from one of the landlady’s old shawls, a cap and a coat, an effigy so lifelike that anyone might easily have been deceived. When they had completed their work, they began to wait for Semyon Ivanovich to return, intending to tell him that his sister-in-law had arrived from Tver and had made herself at home behind his screen, poor woman. But they waited and waited... While they were waiting, Mark Ivanovich even managed to stake and lose half a month’s salary to the lodgers Prepolovenko and Kantarev; Okeanov’s nose grew red and swollen from their games of ‘noses’ and ‘three leaves’* Avdotya the serving-maid had practically the equivalent of a full night’s sleep and got up twice to bring in firewood and light the stove; and Zinovy Prokofyevich, who kept dashing out into the yard every minute or so to see if Semyon Ivanovich was coming, got wet to the skin; but still no one appeared – neither Semyon Ivanovich, nor the drunken beggar. At last they all went to bed, leaving the effigy of the sister-in-law behind Mr Prokharchin’s screen just in case he should turn up; and not until four o’clock in the morning was there a knock at the front

door, so very loud that it thoroughly compensated the waiting residents for all the arduous labours they had undertaken. It was he, none other than the man himself, Semyon Ivanovich, Mr Prokharchin, only in such a condition that they all gasped out loud, and none of them even gave a thought to the sister-in-law. The prodigal had returned unconscious. He was brought, or rather carried in by a soaked and shivering cabby, heaving him on his shoulders. In response to the landlady's query as to where the miserable fellow had drunk himself into such a state, the cabby replied: 'He isn't drunk, hasn't had a drop, I can tell you that for a fact; he's probably fainted, or been hit by something, or maybe he's had a stroke.' They set about examining the culprit, propping him up against the stove for convenience, and saw that this was a case neither of drunkenness nor of stroke, but of some other disorder, for Semyon Ivanovich could not move his tongue, and seemed to be twitching in some kind of convulsions; all he could do was fix a blank stare of bewilderment first on one, then on another of his nocturnally attired spectators. Then they began asking the cabby where he had picked Mr Prokharchin up. 'Well, he was with some fellows from Kolomna,' he replied. 'The devil knows who they were, not exactly what you might call gentlemen, but cherry gents who were out having a good time; he was like this when they gave him to me; I don't know, maybe they'd had a fight, or maybe he'd been taken with some fit or other, God knows what had happened; but they were cheery, decent sort of gents!' Semyon Ivanovich was taken, lifted on to a pair or so of hefty shoulders and carried to his bed. As he straightened himself out in it, he felt the effigy of his sister-in-law beside him and put his feet against his cherished trunk. He uttered a shriek at the top of his voice, sat up almost in a squatting position and, trembling and quivering all over, raked and cleared with his hands as much space in his bed as he could; as he did so he surveyed those present with a flickering but strangely determined gaze; he seemed to be saying that he would rather die than yield to anyone so much as a hundredth part of his meagre bounty...

For two or three days Semyon Ivanovich lay tightly boarded in behind his screen and thus detached from the whole wide world and all its vain commotion. As might be expected, by the following morning everyone had forgotten about him; and meanwhile time flew by in its usual manner, hour followed hour and day followed

day. With a head burning and made heavy by fever, the sick man lay in a state that was half dream and half delirium; but he lay quietly, without moaning or complaining; indeed, he kept very still, made no sound and exercised restraint, flattening himself against his bed the way a hare crouches on the ground in terror at the sound of the hunt. From time to time a long, melancholy silence reigned in the apartment – a sign that all the lodgers had gone to work, and then Semyon Ivanovich, waking from slumber, could relieve his anguished state of mind by listening to the noise in the kitchen close by, where the landlady was bustling about, or to the regular slap of Avdotya the serving-maid's worn-out shoes as she made her way through all the rooms, sighing and groaning, tidying, polishing and dusting all the corners for the sake of order. In this fashion whole hours went by, drowsy, indolent, sleepy, tedious hours like the water that dripped evenly and resonantly from the bench into the washtub in the kitchen. At last the lodgers would return, singly or in groups, and Semyon Ivanovich would without any difficulty at all hear them cursing the weather and saying how hungry they were, and then creating a hubbub as they smoked, waxed sociable with one another, played cards and rattled the cups as they got ready to have tea. Semyon Ivanovich made a mechanical effort to get up and join them in his time-honoured manner for the preparation of the beverage, but immediately fell back asleep again and dreamed that he had already been sitting at the tea table for a long time, chatting and taking part in the conversation, and that Zinovy Prokofyevich had taken advantage of the opportunity to bring up the question of a certain project concerning sisters-in-law and the moral attitude of certain goodmen towards them. Here Semyon Ivanovich had hastened to defend himself and make his due retort, but the imposingly formal phrase 'it has on several occasions been observed' which flew from every tongue put an end to his objections in no uncertain manner, and Semyon Ivanovich could think of nothing else but to start dreaming again that today was the first of the month and that he was being paid his silver rubles in the office where he worked. Opening the envelope on the staircase, he took a quick look around him, hurriedly counted off half of his rightful wages and his the money in his boot. Then, still on the staircase and quite regardless of the fact that he was really doing all this in bed, asleep, he decided that when he got home he would immediately give his landlady the

money he owed her for board and lodging, then to buy a few items of necessity and demonstrate to those concerned, in a casual and seemingly unintentional manner, that a deduction had been made from his salary, and that now he had nothing to send his sister-in-law – following this up at once with a resolve to commiserate with his sister-in-law, to talk a great deal about her the next day and the day after that, and to allude to her poverty again in ten days' time, so that his colleagues should not forget. Having made this decision, he saw that Andrey Yefimovich, the short, eternally silent, bald little man who had a desk in the office direct rooms along from the one where Semyon Ivanovich had his and who had not said a word to him for the past twenty years, was standing near him on the staircase, also counting his silver rubles. 'Money!' Andrey Yefimovich said to him, with a shake of his head. 'If there's no money, there's no bacon,' he added grimly, going downstairs. In the doorway he said, by way of conclusion: 'I have seven, sir.' Here the bald littleman, who was also doubtless perfectly unaware that he was acting in the form of an apparition and not as a part of waking reality, lowered one hand to a point about two and a half feet above the floor and, waving it in a descending line, mumbled that the eldest was attending gymnasium; then, giving Semyon Ivanovich an indignant glance, as though it were Mr Prokharchin who was responsible for the fact that he 'had seven', Andrey Yefimovich pulled his hat down over his eyes, gave his overcoat a shake, turned to the left and was gone. Semyon Ivanovich had received a considerable fright, and even though he was quite certain of his innocence with regard to the unlucky concurrence of seven children under the same roof, it did in the end seem to be the case that Semyon Ivanovich was in fact to blame. In sudden fear he began to run, for the bald gentleman seemed to be coming back in order to catch him up, with the intention of searching him and taking away all his salary, supporting his claim with reference to the inalienable number seven and firmly rejecting the considerations of any sisters-in-law Semyon Ivanovich might have. Mr Prokharchin ran and ran, panting for breath... Running alongside him were other clerks, in great numbers, and they were all jingling their salaries in the rear pockets of their dress jackets, which were short and far too tight; in the end a whole mass of people came running up, there was a trumpeting of fire-alarms, and great waves of humanity swept him along on their shoulders to the very fire he had witnessed together

with the drunken beggar. The drunkard – otherwise known as Mr Zimoveykin – proved to be already on the spot, greeted Semyon Ivanovich in a dreadful state of agitation, seized him by the arm and led him into the very thick of the crowd. Just as it had been before in waking reality, around them clamoured and hooted a vast sea of people, which was dammed between the two bridges of the Fontanka Embankment and took up all the surrounding streets and lanes as well; just as before, Semyon Ivanovich and the drunkard were swept along behind some kind of fence, where they were held jammed, as though in a pair of pincers, in an enormous wood-yard full of spectators who had arrived from the streets, from Tolkuchy Market and from all the surrounding houses, inns and cafés.

Semyon Ivanovich beheld it all as he had done before, and with the same emotions; in the whirl of fever and delirium certain strange faces began to flicker before his eyes. He remembered some of them. One of them belonged to the very same gentleman who had produced such an impression on everyone, seven feet tall and with whiskers a couple of feet long, who during the actual fire had stood behind Semyon Ivanovich and had urged him on when our hero, in the grip of something resembling ecstasy, had stamped his little feet as though in this manner to applaud the work of the gallant fire brigade, of which he had an excellent view from his elevated vantage-point. Another was the face of the burly fellow from whom our hero had received a punch masquerading as a lift on to another fence, when he had nearly been about to climb over the first one, possibly in order to save someone. He also glimpsed the form of the old man with the haemorrhoidal face who had been wearing a tattered, cotton-padded dressing-gown tied around the midriff with something or another, who before the onset of the fire had slipped out to the corner shop for rusks and tobacco for his lodger and who was now, clutching a milk-jug and a quart measure, fighting his way through the crowd to the house where his wife, daughter and thirty and a half rubles under the feather mattress in the corner were all going up in flames. Most clearly of all, however, he saw the poor, sinful woman of whom he had already dreamt more than once in the course of his illness. She appeared to him now as she had done then, in bast shoes, holding a crutch, a wicker basket on her back, her clothes in tatters. She was shouting louder than the firemen and the crowd, brandishing her crutch and waving her arms about, telling everyone that her own children had turned her

out and that she had lost two five-copeck pieces in the process. The children and five copecks, five copecks and the children – the words spun round on her tongue in an obscure, unintelligible jabber, on which all had turned their back safter fruitless efforts at comprehension; but the woman would not quieten down, she kept shouting, wailing and flailing her arms about, seeming to pay no attention either to the fire, to which she had been swept along by the crowd from the street, or to the rabble which surrounded her on all sides, or to the misfortune of others, or even to the smouldering brands and sparks with which the bystanders were already beginning to be showered. Finally Mr Prokharchin felt an attack of terror coming on; for he could clearly see that there was some hidden design behind all this, and that he was not going to get away unscathed. And indeed, there, not far away from him, clambering up on to the woodpile was a muzhik of some kind dressed in a torn, unbelted cloth coat, his hair and beard both singed, who began to incite the whole vast crowd against Semyon I vanovich. The crowd grew denser and denser, the muzhik continued to shout and, rigid with horror, Mr Prokharchin suddenly realized that the muzhik was a cabby whom, only five days earlier, he had cheated in the most inhuman manner, giving him the slip without paying his fare, darting through a side entrance and kicking up his heels as he ran as though he were fleeing across a red-hot stove. The desperate Mr Prokharchin tried to speak, to shout, but his voice had failed him. He felt the whole infuriated crowd coiling around him like a multicoloured snake, crushing him and choking him. He made one final, extraordinary effort – and woke up. Then he saw that he was on fire, that his screens were on fire, that the whole apartment was on fire, together with Ustinaya Fyodorovna and all her paying guests, that his bed, his pillow, his quilt, his trunk and, finally, his precious mattress – all were on fire. Semyon Ivanovich leapt up, grabbed hold of his mattress and fled, dragging it after him. But when our hero entered the landlady's room, into which he had run exactly as he was, without a stitch of decency, barefoot and in his nightshirt, the lodgers intercepted him, pinioned his arms and carried him triumphantly back behind his screen, which, incidentally, had not caught fire at all, the fire being rather inside Semyon Ivanovich's brain – and put him to bed. In just such a fashion might a ragged, surly and unshaven organ-grinder put away in his travelling box his Punchinello, who has indulged in

brawls, battered and broken everyone else, sold his soul to the devil and is at last ceasing his existence until the next performance, in the same box as the devil, the blackamoors, Petrushka, Mademoiselle Katerina and her lucky lover, the district police captain.

Everyone, young and old alike, immediately surrounded Semyon Ivanovich, standing side by side around his bed and turning faces full of expectation on the sick man. In the meantime he had recovered consciousness but, whether out of shame or for some other reason, suddenly began to pull the quilt over him with all his might, doubtless wishing to conceal himself beneath it from the attention of his commiserators. At last Mark Ivanovich broke the silence and, being a clever man, began to say very gently that Semyon Ivanovich must calm himself, that being ill was a shame and a disgrace, that only little children behaved this way, that he must get well again and then return to the office. Mark Ivanovich rounded off his remarks with a little joke, saying that no fixed rate of salary had as yet been established for sick clerks, and since he was quite secure in the knowledge that their rank would be very lowly, in his opinion at least such a profession or career would bring no great or material advantages. In a word, it was clear that everyone was taking a genuine interest in Semyon Ivanovich's fortunes, and that they had the greatest of sympathy with him. With incomprehensible churlishness, however, he continued to lie on his bed, refusing to utter a word and pulling the quilt more and more stubbornly over himself. But Mark Ivanovich would not admit defeat and, mastering his emotions, again said something very sugary to Semyon Ivanovich, certain that this was how one was supposed to behave towards a man who was sick; but Semyon Ivanovich would have none of it; instead, he muttered something through his teeth with a most distrustful look and suddenly began to squint sullenly from right to left, apparently wishing to reduce all his commiserators to ashes by his very gaze. It was no good beating about the bush; Mark Ivanovich could restrain himself no longer: observing that the man had simply decided to be stubborn, having taken umbrage and lost his temper completely, he declared bluntly and without any sugary circumlocutions now that it was time Mr Prokharchin got up, that he had lain there quite long enough, that his constant shouting day and night about fires, sisters-in-law, drunkards, locks, trunks and the devil only knew what else was stupid, unseemly and outrageous, for if Semyon Ivanovich did not

want to sleep, others did, and would he please make a note of it. This speech had its effect: Semyon Ivanovich at once turned in the orator's direction, and said in a voice which, though steady, was none the less hoarse and feeble: 'You hold your tongue, jackanapes! You're an idle chatterer, a foul-mouthed fellow! Got that, heel? Think you're a prince, eh? Got it?' At the sound of such words, Mark Ivanovich flared into a rage but, recollecting that he was dealing with a sick man, magnanimously refused to take offence and attempted instead to make Mr Prokharchin feel ashamed of himself; here, too, however, his efforts were cut short, for Semyon Ivanovich immediately remarked that he would not permit Mark Ivanovich to trifle with him, for all that Mark Ivanovich wrote poetry. There ensued a silence that lasted all of two minutes; at last recovering from his amazement, Mark Ivanovich plainly and clearly, with much eloquence, though not without firmness, declared that Semyon Ivanovich must bear in mind that he was among men of good breeding, and that 'dear sir, you must learn how to conduct yourself with persons of good breeding'. Mark Ivanovich was able on occasion to speak with an oratorical flourish, and liked to make an impression on his listeners. For his part, doubtless as a result of his inveterate habit of keeping silent, Semyon Ivanovich spoke and acted in a rather more abrupt manner; moreover, when, for example, he had occasion to embark upon a long sentence, the further into it he got, the more each word seemed to give rise to another word, which at once gave rise to a third, a third to a fourth and so on, so that his mouth was stuffed full, a tickling began in his throat, and the stuffed-in words at last came fluttering out in the most picturesque disorder. It was for this reason that Semyon Ivanovich, though an intelligent man, sometimes spoke some fearful rubbish. 'You don't know what you're talking about,' he replied now. 'You big hulk, you waster! Just wait till you're ruined, and have to go begging; you're a free-thinker, a libertine; that's what you are, poet!'

'Really, Semyon Ivanovich, I think you must still be raving!'

'You listen to me,' Semyon Ivanovich replied. 'A fool raves, a drunkard raves, a dog raves, but a wise man shows some sense. You don't know what you're about, do you hear, you loose-living fellow, you intellectual, you talk like a book! One day you'll catch fire and you won't even notice that your head's burnt off. Got it?'

‘Er... I’m not sure... What do you mean, Semyon Ivanovich? My head burnt off... ?’

Mark Ivanovich did not pursue his enquiry, as everyone could clearly see that Semyon Ivanovich had not yet recovered his senses and was still raving; but the landlady could restrain herself no longer, and said without further ado that the house had burned down in Krivoy Lane the other day because of a scatter-brained girl; that there had been a scatter-brained girl living there; that she had lit a candle and set fire to the storeroom; but that such a thing would not happen in her apartment, and that the corners would be safe.

‘For heaven’s sake, Semyon Ivanovich!’ shouted Zinovy Prokofyevich, beside himself, interrupting the landlady. ‘Semyon Ivanovich, what on earth has got into you, you silly, sick old man? Don’t you see that people have been making a fool of you with all these jokes about your sister-in-law and dancing exams? Don’t you? Don’t you see?’

‘You listen here,’ replied our hero, raising himself from his bed, mustering the last of his strength and venting every ounce of spite and rage that was in him. ‘Who’s calling me a fool? You’re a fool and ahound, a fool of a man, but I won’t provide foolery to your orders, sir; do you hear, you jackanapes? I am no servant of yours, sir!’

Here Semyon Ivanovich tried to say something else, but fell back on his bed, all strength gone. His commiserators were left in a state of bewilderment. They all stood with mouths agape, for they now surmised what had happened to Semyon Ivanovich, but did not know what to do next. Suddenly the kitchen door gave a creak and opened, and the drunken friend – otherwise known as Mr Zimoveykin – timidly poked his head round it, cautiously sniffing the lie of the land in his usual way. It was as if they had all been waiting for him; everyone began to signal to him to come in as quickly as he could, and Zimoveykin, thoroughly delighted and without removing his overcoat, pushed his way hurriedly through to Semyon Ivanovich’s bedside, ready to do his utmost.

Zimoveykin had evidently stayed up all the previous night engaged in some kind of major exertion. The right side of his face was covered in sticking plaster; his swollen eyelids were caked with

the matter that had run from his festering eyes; his jacket and all his clothes were ripped and torn, and the entire left side of his apparel seemed, what was more, to have been sprayed with some thoroughly evil smelling substance which might have been dirt from some puddle. Under his arm he was carrying someone's violin, which he was taking somewhere in order to sell. They had plainly not been mistaken in inviting him to help, for immediately, having sized up the situation, he turned to the delinquent Semyon Ivanovich and, with the air of a man in a superior position, who, moreover, knows a thing or two, said: 'What are you doing, Senka? Get up! What are you doing, wise man Prokharchin? Show a bit of sense! I'll steal all your money if you go on throwing your weight around like this; stop throwing your weight around!' This short but powerful speech astonished those present in the room; they were all even more astonished when they observed that upon seeing this person in front of him and hearing all that he had to say, Mr Prokharchin was so flabbergasted, reduced to such a state of timidity and confusion that he could only barely, through his teeth, mutter in a whisper the inevitable expression of protest. 'Get out of here, you miserable wretch, you thief! Do you hear, have you got that? You think you're a regular big shot, don't you, you grand Panjandrum, you think you're a regular big shot!'

'No, old chap,' Zimoveykin replied in a drawling voice, keeping all his wits about him. 'That's not very worthy of you, Prokharchin, you wise old owl, you regular Prokharchin of a man,' Zimoveykin continued, parodying Semyon Ivanovich slightly and looking about him with satisfaction. 'Stop throwing your weight around! Behave yourself, Senya, behave yourself or I'll report you, my fine fellow, I'll tell them all about you – got that?'

It appeared that the message had got through to Semyon Ivanovich, for upon hearing the conclusion of this speech he gave a start and suddenly began to look all round him, swiftly and with a look of utter desperation. Pleased with the effect he was having, Mr Zimoveykin prepared to continue, but Mark Ivanovich forestalled his ardour by waiting until Semyon Ivanovich had quietened down, become more amenable and almost completely recovered his calm, and then began at length and in reasoned tones to impress upon the uneasy man that to harbour the sort of thoughts that were now in his head was, for one thing, pointless, and for another, not only

pointless but even harmful; and indeed, for that matter, not so much harmful as positively immoral; the reason being *that* Semyon Ivanovich was leading them all astray and setting a bad example. Everyone expected these words to produce a sensible result. What was more, Semyon Ivanovich had now become quite peaceful and was making only the most measured of protests. A modest argument began. The lodgers addressed him in a brotherly sort of way, enquiring as to why he had got the wind up so badly. Semyon Ivanovich did make a reply, but in a rather roundabout fashion. They remonstrated with him; he remonstrated back. Another exchange of protests followed, and then everyone, young and old, joined in the *mêlée*, for a subject of conversation so strange and startling suddenly cropped up that no one really knew how to deal with it. The argument finally developed into expressions of impatience, impatience led to shouting, shouting led to tears, and at last Mark Ivanovich withdrew foaming at the mouth and declaring that he had never met such an arrantly stubborn and single-minded individual in all his born days. Oplevaniyev spat, Okeanov took fright, Zinovy Prokofyevich started to cry, and Ustinya Fyodorovna set up one of her most impressive wails, howling that her lodger had ‘gone and got bats in the upper storey’, that the poor lamb was going to the without a passport, that he wasn’t registered, that she was all alone and would be hauled in by the police. In short, they all at last clearly saw that the sowing had been good, that all that had been sown had brought forth an hundredfold, that the ground was favoured, and that in their company Semyon Ivanovich had succeeded in working his head off well and truly, and in the most irrevocable manner. They all fell silent, for though they had seen that Semyon Ivanovich had got the wind up, this time his commiserators had got the wind up, too...

‘For heaven’s sake!’ cried Mark Ivanovich. ‘What is it you’re afraid of? Why have you lost your wits? Who cares anything about you, my good sir? Do you think you have any right to be as scared as this? Who are you? What are you? A zero, sir, a round pancake, that’s all you are! What’s all your fuss about? Just because a woman’s been run over in the street, do you think you’re going to be run over, too? Just because some drunkard forgot to guard his pocket, do you think your coat-tails are going to be cut off? Just because a house burns down, does your head have to burn off, too? Is that it, sir? Is that it?’

‘You, you – you’re stupid!’ Semyon Ivanovich muttered. ‘You could have your nose eaten off, but you’d eat it yourself with bread and never notice*...’

‘I freely admit that I’m a cad,’ cried Mark Ivanovich, who was not really listening. ‘I’m a caddish sort of fellow. But then, I don’t have to sit an examination, find a wife, or take dancing lessons; the earth isn’t opening under me, my dear sir. What’s wrong, sir? Isn’t there enough room in the world for you? Is the floor giving way beneath your feet, or something?’

‘What do you mean? Who asked you? They’ll close it down, and that will be the end of me.’

‘What? What will they close down? What are you driving at – eh?’

‘They dismissed the drunkard...’

‘All right, so they did; but you and I aren’t drunkards, we’re men!’

‘All right, so we’re men. But it’s there today, and it’ll be gone tomorrow...’

‘Gone? What’ll be gone?’

‘The office... The of-fice!’

‘But my dear, good fellow! The office is needed, it can’t be done without!...’

‘That may be so, but you listen here: it’s needed today, it’ll be needed tomorrow, but the day after tomorrow it won’t be needed at all. You see, I heard a story...’

‘But they pay you an annual salary! You’re a Thomas, a doubting Thomas, you man of little faith! You’ll be given another position on account of your senior rank...’

‘Salary? But I’ll spend it all, thieves will come and take my money; and I’ve a sister-in-law, do you hear me? A sister-in-law! You and your one-track mind!...’

‘Your sister-in-law! My dear man, you’re...’

‘I’m a man; yes, I’m a man, but you, you bookworm, are a stupid nincompoop; listen, one-track mind, you man of only one track,

listen to this! I'm not talking about any of your jokes; but my job's the sort of job that's here today and gone tomorrow. Even Demid, do you hear, Demid Vasilyevich says my job's for the chop...'

'Oh, Demid, Demid! He's a young rascal, and I mean...'

'Yes – bang! Just like that! And there's no job left; and off I go to the devil...'

'Well you're either talking nonsense or you've gone off your head completely! Tell us straight, now: which is it? Confess, if that's what's the matter with you! It's nothing to be ashamed of! Have you gone off your head, sir, eh?'

'He's gone off his head! He's gone insane!' people shouted all around, and everyone wrung their hands in despair; the landlady had thrown both of her arms around Mark Ivanovich, for fear he might tear Semyon Ivanovich to pieces.

'You're a pagan, a pagan soul, you're a man of wisdom!' said Mr Zimoveykin, imploringly. 'Senya, you're not a man to take offence, you're pleasant and kind! You're simple, you're virtuous... Do you hear? All this has come about because of your goodness; I mean, I'm just a stupid, rough sort of fellow, a beggar, really; but your good self hasn't abandoned me, not likely; just see the honour you and your friends have done me; so here's thanks to you all, and to your landlady; look, I bow down to the ground before you; here, look; it's my duty, I'm only fulfilling my duty, dear lady!' Here Zimoveykin actually did bow down to the ground in a sweeping movement that included everyone, performing the action with a kind of pedantic dignity. After it was over, Semyon Ivanovich wanted to carry on talking, but this time they would not let him; they all intervened, imploring him, assuring him, consoling him, until they had contrived to make Semyon Ivanovich feel thoroughly ashamed of himself and, at length, in a feeble voice he asked to be allowed to explain himself.

'It's like this,' he said. 'It's true – I'm pleasant, gentle, and virtuous, do you hear, I'm devoted and loyal; I'd sacrifice the last drop of my blood, you know – do you hear, jackanapes, big shot... all right, so the job's still there; but I mean, I'm poor; and if they take it away from me, do you hear, big shot – be quiet now, and listen to this – if they take it away, it'll... it'll be there, brother, and

then it won't be there... do you understand? And then I'll be off begging, brother, do you hear?'

'Senka!' Zimoveykin wailed frantically, his voice drowning out all the hubbub that had arisen. 'You're a free-thinker! I'll report you! What are you? Who are you? Are you a common ruffian, a thickhead with no brains? They'd dismiss a stupid ruffian without notice, don't you realize that? What sort of a man are you?'

'Well, it's just that...'

'What?'

'Well, why don't you just go to the devil?'

'Go to the devil?'

'Yes, well, he's a subversive, and I'm a subversive; and if a man goes on lying in bed every day, eventually...'

'What?'

'He'll turn into a free-thinker...'

'A free-think-er? Senka, you're a free-thinker!'

'Wait!' cried Mr Prokharchin, waving his arm to subdue the shouting that was about to begin. 'I don't mean it that way... Try to grasp this, grasp it, you sheep's head: I'm well-behaved today, I'll be well-behaved tomorrow, but then suddenly I'll stop being well-behaved – I'll be rude to someone; they'll give you the buckle,* and the free-thinker will get his marching orders!...'

'What's this you're saying?' Mark Ivanovich thundered at last, leaping up from the chair on which he had sat down in order to rest, and running across to the bed in a state of utter excitement and frenzy, quivering all over with vexation and furious rage. 'What are you saying? You sheep! You've neither house nor home! What, do you think you're the only person in the world? Do you think the world was made for you? What are you – some kind of Napoleon? What are you? Who are you? Are you a Napoleon, eh? Are you a Napoleon? Answer me, sir, are you a Napoleon?'

But Mr Prokharchin made no reply to this question. Not because he was ashamed of being a Napoleon, or afraid of taking such a responsibility upon himself – no, he was no longer capable either of arguing or of pursuing the matter any further... His illness was

approaching its crisis. Small, fast tears suddenly streamed from his grey eyes, which glittered with a hectic light. With bony hands that were emaciated from illness he covered his burning face, raised himself on his bed and, sobbing, began to say that he was completely impoverished, that he was an utterly ordinary, miserable man, that he was stupid and ignorant, that people must forgive him, look after him, protect him, give him food and drink, not leave him in his calamity, and God knows what else; thus did Semyon Ivanovich wail. As he did so, he looked around him in wild terror, as though at any moment he expected the ceiling to fall in or the floor to give way. As they looked at the sick man, everyone began to feel sorry for him, and their hearts softened towards him. Sobbing like a peasant woman, the landlady, too, wailed of her own lonely and defenceless plight, and helped the sick man back into bed with her own hands. Mark Ivanovich, perceiving the uselessness of disturbing the memory of Napoleon, at once relapsed into good-nature and proceeded to offer his assistance, too. The others, in order in their turn to have something to do, suggested an infusion of raspberry tea, claiming that it was instantly efficacious in all disorders, and that the sick man would find it most refreshing; but Zimoveykin immediately refuted this, averring that in a case such as the present one there was nothing better as a remedy than a certain type of pungent camomile. As for Zinoviy Prokofyevich, being a good-hearted fellow, he positively dissolved in tears, sobbing his repentance for having frightened Semyon Ivanovich with various cock-and-bull stories and, latching on to the sick man's latest avowal that he was completely impoverished and to his request that he be fed, began to organize a subvention which for the time being was to be limited to the residents of the corners. Everyone oh'd and ah'd, everyone felt sorry and distressed, while at the same time everyone wondered how the man could have got himself into such a state of panic. What could he be so afraid of? They could have understood it if he had occupied an important position, had a wife and children to support; they could have understood it if it were a question of him being hauled before some tribunal or other; but the man was just rubbish; all he owned was a trunk with a German lock; for more than twenty years he had lain behind his screen, never uttering a word, knowing nothing of the world or its cares, hoarding his meagre salary, and now suddenly, all because of someone's trivial, idle remark he had completely lost

his wits with fear that life might suddenly become difficult for him... And it did not even seem to occur to the man that everyone found life difficult! 'If he'd only taken that into account,' Okeanov said later, 'the fact that life's difficult for us all, he'd have saved his sanity, stopped carrying on that way and somehow lived his life in a decent manner.' All that day Semyon Ivanovich was the sole topic of conversation. People went to talk to him, asked about him, comforted him; but by the time it was evening no amount of comforting would have done him any good. The poor man started to hallucinate and developed a fever; he fell into an unconscious stupor, and they nearly thought of sending for a doctor; the lodgers agreed on a course of action and all promised to take turns at watching over Semyon Ivanovich and calming him, and if anything should happen, to waken the others at once. With this aim in mind, in order not to fall asleep, they sat down to play cards, having stationed by the sick man's bedside the drunken friend, who had now spent the entire day in the corners, and had asked to stay the night. Since the game was being played on credit and thus afforded not the slightest interest, they soon grew tired of it. They abandoned it, then started to argue about something, then began to make a noise and bang their fists, and finally dispersed to their separate corners, still continuing to shout and dispute angrily for a long time after that; indeed, so exhausted did their anger make them that they lost their resolve to sit up on watch, and fell asleep instead. Soon it was silent in the corners as in an empty cellar, an effect intensified by the horrible cold. One of the last to fall asleep was Okeanov. 'I wasn't sure whether I was dreaming or awake,' he said afterwards, 'but it seemed to me that near me, just before dawn, I saw two men holding a conversation together.' Okeanov said that he had recognized Zimo-veykin, that Zimoveykin had woken his old friend Remnev, and that they had talked for a long time in a whisper; then Zimoveykin had gone through into the kitchen, where he could be heard trying to unlock the door. The landlady afterwards confirmed that the key to the door, which she usually kept under her pillow, had gone missing that night. Finally, Okeanov testified that he had heard both men go behind the screens to where the sick man lay, and had seen them light a candle there. 'I don't know any more than that,' he said, 'for my eyes fell shut.' He woke up later along with all the others, when everyone in the corners suddenly leapt from their beds at the sound of a shriek from

behind the screens that would have woken the dead – and it seemed to many of them that at that moment the candle had gone out. A pandemonium ensued; everyone's heart froze; they rushed pell-mell in the direction of the shriek, but at that moment from behind the screens came the sounds of scuffling, shouting, cursing and fighting. Someone struck a light, and they saw Zimoveykin and Remnev fighting together, cursing and rebuking each other; as the light fell on them, one of them shouted, 'It's not me, it's this bandit!' and the other, who turned out to be Zimoveykin, shouted: 'Don't touch me, I haven't done anything, I swear it to you!' Neither of them looked like human beings; but in that first moment no one paid any attention to them: for the sick man was not in his previous position behind the screen. They wasted no time inseparating the combatants and hauling them away, and saw that Mr Prokharchin was lying underneath the bed, apparently quite unconscious, having dragged his blanket and pillow with him, for all that remained on the bed itself was the bare, decrepit and greasy mattress (he had never used sheets). They hauled Semyon Ivanovich out, stretched him on the mattress, but immediately saw that there was no need for much further concern over him, that he was utterly done for; his hands had gone rigid, and he was at his last gasp. They stood over him: he was still shuddering and trembling all over, trying to do something with his arms; he articulated no sound, but winked in precisely the way a head, still warm and bleeding, having just bounced from the executioner's axe, is said to wink.

At last everything grew quieter and quieter; the death-tremors and convulsions died away; Mr Prokharchin stretched his legs and set off, for better or worse, into the unknown. Whether Semyon Ivanovich had been frightened by something, whether he had had a dream of the kind described later by Remnev, or whether something else had been to blame – all that remain unclear; all that is certain is that even if the chief executor himself had entered the apartment and personally served notice on Semyon Ivanovich for free-thinking, drunkenness and rowdy behaviour, even if through the other door some shabby-coated beggarwoman bearing the appellation of Semyon Ivanovich's sister-in-law had made her appearance, even if Semyon Ivanovich had right there and then received a two-hundred-ruble bonus, or even if, finally, the house had caught fire and Semyon Ivanovich's head had begun to burn in earnest, it is unlikely that he would have stirred a finger now at

such news. While everyone was getting over their initial stunned surprise, while they were recovering their power of speech and launching themselves into an excited flurry of suggestions, doubts and expostulations, while Ustinya Fyodorovna was dragging the trunk out from under the bed, hastily rummaging under Semyon Ivanovich's pillow, under his mattress and even inside his boots, while they were questioning Remnev and Zimoveykin, the lodger Okeanov, who up until then had been the dullest, meekest, and quietest of them all, suddenly acquired some presence of mind, displayed his true mettle, snatched up his cap and, under cover of the general hubbub, slipped out of the apartment. Then, just as the horrors of anarchy were reaching their culminatory phase in the hitherto peaceful corners, the door opened and there suddenly appeared, like a bolt from the blue, first a gentleman of highly moral appearance with a stern and displeased expression, then Yaroslav Ilyich, followed by his retinue of staff and functionaries and, bringing up the rear, an embarrassed Mr Okeanov. The stern-looking gentleman went straight up to Semyon Ivanovich, felt his pulse, made a face, shrugged his shoulders and announced what everyone knew already, namely that the deceased man had passed away, merely adding the comment that the same thing had happened only the other day to a certain important and highly respected gentleman who had also died suddenly in his sleep. Here the gentleman with the highly moral and displeased countenance turned away from the bedside, saying that they had bothered him for nothing, and left. His place was immediately taken by Yaroslav Ilyich (Remnev and Zimoveykin having been delivered into the custody of the appropriate authorities), who questioned some of the lodgers, deftly took possession of the trunk which the landlady was already trying to open, put Mr Prokharchin's boots back where they had been before, remarking that they were full of holes and of no further use whatever, requested that the pillow be put back, summoned Okeanov, asked for the key to the trunk which was discovered to be in the pocket of the drunken friend, and solemnly, in front of the proper persons, unlocked the personal estate of Semyon Ivanovich. It was all there: two rags, one pair of socks, half a handkerchief, an old hat, several buttons, some old boot-soles and uppers – in short, relics, remnants and refuse; in other words, rubbish, remainders, rests and relicts, which had a fusty smell; the only thing of any value was the German lock. Okeanov was

summoned and the matter sternly discussed with him; but Okeanov was ready to swear an oath that he knew nothing. They asked to see the pillow, and examined it: it was dirty, but was in all other respects a perfectly ordinary pillow. They set to work on the mattress, and were lifting it up when they stopped to think for a moment or two; then all of a sudden, quite unexpectedly, something heavy fell with a resonant thud on the floor. They bent down, searched about and discovered a paper roll containing about a dozen rubles. 'Aha!' Yaroslav Ilyich said, pointing to a tear in the mattress from which hair and stuffing protruded. They examined the tear and ascertained that it had been made very recently with a knife, and was about a foot long; they felt inside it and pulled out the landlady's kitchen knife, which someone had doubtless hidden in there after using it to slit the mattress. Yaroslav Ilyich had hardly had time to retrieve the knife from the tear and say 'Aha!' again, when another roll of money fell out, followed by two fifty-copeck pieces, a twenty-five-copeck piece, some coins of small value and a large, old-style *pyatak*.^{*} They immediately picked these up in their hands. They then realized that it might not be a bad idea to cut the mattress completely open with a pair of scissors. Scissors were requested...

Meanwhile the dying end of the tallow candle illuminated a scene that would have aroused the inquisitiveness of any onlooker. About a dozen lodgers were grouped around the bed in the most picturesque garb, all uncombed, unshaved, unwashed and sleepy-eyed, just as they had been on going to bed. Some of them were quite pale, others had sweaty foreheads; some were shivering, while others looked as though they had fever. The landlady, quite stupefied, was standing quietly with her arms folded, awaiting the merciful attentions of Yaroslav Ilyich. From above, atop the stove, the heads of Avdotya the serving-maid and the landlady's favourite cat looked down with frightened curiosity; scattered all around lay the torn and broken screen; the open trunk displayed its ignoble contents; the quilt and pillow, covered with bits of stuffing from the mattress, lay carelessly in a heap; and on the three-legged wooden table the gradually increasing mound of silver and other coins shone and sparkled. Semyon Ivanovich alone preserved his cool-headedness, lay peacefully on the bed and seemed to have no inkling of his impending ruin. Indeed, when the scissors were brought and Yaroslav Ilyich's assistant, wishing to make himself

useful, shook the mattress somewhat impatiently, so as the more conveniently to free it from the back of its owner, Semyon Ivanovich, being a polite soul, first made a little room by shifting over on his side with his back to the searchers; then, at a second jolt, he turned on his stomach, and finally made even more room; but since the outermost board of the bedstead was missing on that side, he suddenly plunged headlong to the floor, leaving only two thin, bony, blue legs exposed to view, sticking upright like two branches of a charred tree. Since this was the second time that morning that Mr Prokharchin had popped under his bed, he immediately aroused suspicion, and some of the tenants, led by Zinovy Prokofyevich, crawled underneath it with the intention of finding out whether there was in fact something concealed there, too. But the searchers only succeeded in knocking their heads together for nothing, and since Yaroslav Ilyich shouted to them to extricate Semyon Ivanovich from his undignified position at once, two of the more sensible of them each took hold of one of his legs, hauled the unconventional capitalist out into the light of day and placed him across the bed. Meanwhile hair and cotton mattress stuffing were flying everywhere, the pile of silver was growing – and, gracious! what was there not to be found in it... Noble silver ruble sovereigns, robust and respectable one-and-a-half-ruble crowns, pretty half-ruble coins, plebeian twenty-five- and twenty-copeck pieces, even the unpromising currency of old ladies, silver ten- and five-copeck bits – all done up in the correct paper rolls, in the most methodical and respectable order. There were collector's items, too: two tokens of some kind; a *napoléon d'or*; a coin whose origins were obscure but which was very rare... Some of the ruble coins were of great antiquity; there were worn and shaven coins from the reign of the Empress Elizabeth, from the days of Peter the Great, from Catherine's reign; there were German kreutzers; there were coins which are nowadays exceedingly rare – old fifteen-copeck pieces which had holes pierced in them so they could be worn in the ears, all rubbed completely smooth, but with the correct number of serrations; there were even coppers, but they were all green and tarnished... They found one red ten-ruble note – but that was all. At last, when the dissection had been performed and when, having shaken the mattress-cover several times, they could find nothing else that clinked, they placed all the money on the table and began to count it. It would have been possible at first

sight to be completely deceived, and to make a straight guess at a million – such an enormous pile it was. But it was not a million, though it did prove to be a most considerable sum – two thousand four hundred and ninety seven rubles and fifty copecks, to be precise; and the subvention that had been organized by Zinovy Proko fyevich the day before would have brought this up to a round figure of no more than two and a half thousand. They gathered the money together, placed a seal on the dead man's trunk, heard out the landlady's complaints and told her when and where she should present her testimony with regard to the paltry sum owed to her by the dead man. Signed statements were taken from the proper persons; here the question of the sister-in-law was almost broached; but, having satisfied themselves that the sister-in-law was in a certain sense a myth, being a product of the lack of imagination with which they had more than once reproached the deceased in respect of his documents – they dropped the idea as being useless, likely to cause harm and to bring his, Mr Prokharchin's, good name into disrepute; with this the matter was concluded. When, however, the initial shock had faded, when they had had time to regain their wits and had perceived what manner of man the deceased had been, they all grew quiet and subdued and began to look at one another distrustfully. Some of them took Semyon Ivanovich's action very much to heart, and even seemed to take offence... All that capital! The man had fairly been putting it away! Never one to lose his presence of mind, Mark Ivanovich started to launch into an explanation of why Semyon Ivanovich had suddenly become so frightened; but no one listened to him. Zinovy Prokofyevich seemed very preoccupied. Okeanov had a drop or two to drink, the others huddled up together, as it were, and when evening came the little clerk Kantarev, who was distinguished by his nose, which resembled a sparrow's beak, moved out of the apartment, having thoroughly sealed and tied all his boxes and bundles, coldly explaining to those who were curious that times were hard and that he could not afford to continue lodging there. The landlady howled without cease, wailing and cursing Semyon Ivanovich for having taken advantage of her orphaned state. She asked Mark Ivanovich why the dead man had not taken his money to the bank.

'He was too simple, mother; he didn't have enough imagination to do that,' Mark Ivanovich replied.

‘You’re too simple, as well, mother,’ Okeanov interjected. ‘For twenty years the man held out in that room of yours, and then the merest push knocked him down, but you had cabbage soup on the boil and hadn’t any time to see him... Oh – mother!’

‘Ach, the poor lamb!’ the landlady went on. ‘He needn’t even have used a bank, if he’d just brought his handful of money to me and said to me: “Here, my dearest Ustinya, here is all my wealth, keep me going with your hot dinners until the cold earth swallows me up,” then I swear by the holy icon that I’d have tended him and given him food and drink. But oh, the sinner and deceiver that he was! He tricked and cheated an orphan woman!...’

Again they approached Semyon Ivanovich’s bed. Now he lay in state, clad in his best and only suit, hiding his stiff chin in a cravat that was tied a little awkwardly, washed, his hair combed and sleeked, but not quite smoothly shaven, as there was no razor to be found anywhere in the corners: the only one there had been had belonged to Zinovy Prokofyevich, had gone blunt a year earlier and had been sold at a profit on Tolkuchy Market; the others went to the barber’s to be shaved. They had not yet had time to clear up the mess. The broken screen still lay where it had done before and, inexpressing Semyon Ivanovich’s solitariness, seemed like an emblem of the fact that death tears the veil from all our secrets, intrigues and procrastinations. The stuffing from the mattress, which had not been cleared up either, lay all around in thick masses. The whole of this corner which had suddenly grown cold might well have been compared by a poet to the ruined nest of a ‘thrifty’ swallow: it had all been broken and disfigured by the storm, the fledglings and their mother killed, the warm little nest of down, feathers and strands of cotton blowing about them in the wind... To extend the analogy in a different direction, however, Semyon Ivanovich sooner resembled a thievish and conceited old sparrow. He had piped down now, seemed to be lying low, as though it were not he that was to blame, as though it had not been he that had played tricks in order to cheat and dupe good folk, without shame or conscience, in the most indecent manner. He no longer heard the sobbing and wailing of his orphaned and deeply offended landlady. On the contrary, like a hardened capitalist of long experience, who even in his coffin would not dream of wasting a single moment in inactivity, he seemed to be wholly immersed in some kind of speculative calculations. His

face now wore an expression of profound thought, and his lips were pursed with a significant air, an air which during his lifetime no one would ever have suspected to be one of Semyon Ivanovich's characteristic qualities. It was as if he had acquired some cleverness. His right eye seemed to be screwed up in a rascally sort of way; Semyon Ivanovich seemed to be trying to say something, to communicate something extremely urgent, to explain himself without delay, as quickly as possible, as business was pressing and there was no time to lose... And they seemed to hear him say: 'What are you going on about? Stop it, do you hear, you stupid woman! Don't whimper! Go and sleep it off, woman, do you hear? I'm dead now; there's no need for all of that any more; really, no need at all! I like lying here... But that's not what I mean, do you hear; you're a big shot, a regular big shot of a woman – so understand this: I may be dead now; but, what I mean to say is, well, perhaps it isn't really so, perhaps I'm not dead at all, do you hear – so what if I were to get up, do you hear, what would happen then, eh?'



A TALE

I began to study the man carefully. Even in his external appearance there was something so peculiar that, no matter how dispersed one's thoughts might be, one found oneself compelled to rivet one's gaze on him and immediately burst into the most unrestrained laughter. That is what had happened to me. I should note that the eyes of this little gentleman were so mobile, and he himself so much subject to the magnetism of the eyes of others, that he seemed to guess by instinct that he was being observed, turned instantly to the observer and nervously analysed his gaze. His incessant mobility and quickness of response made him look for all the world like a weather-vane. It was strange: he seemed afraid of being laughed at, and yet he practically made his living out of being an eternal buffoon, obediently offering his head to every flick and fillip, both in a metaphysical sense and in a physical one, depending on what sort of company he was in. As a rule, voluntary buffoons are not even pathetic. But I at once noticed that this strange creature, this ridiculous little man was by no means a buffoon by profession. There remained in him still some residue of nobility. All his nervousness, his perpetual morbid fear for himself actually worked in his favour. I had the impression that his desire to be of service stemmed more from kindness of heart than from the hope of any material advantage. He was only too happy to let people laugh openly and loudly at him, and in the most unseemly manner, to his face; but at the same time – I will give my oath to this – his heart ached and bled at the thought that his listeners were so ignobly callous as to be able to laugh not at some deed of his but at himself, at his entire being, at his heart, his intellect, his appearance, the whole of his flesh-and-blood reality. I am certain that at such moments he experienced the full absurdity of his situation; but each time the protest would instantly die on his lips, though it invariably arose in the most generous and copious fashion. I am certain that all this, too, was nothing other than the product of a kindly heart, and was not in any way connected with a fear of the material disadvantage of being turned out neck and crop and being unable to borrow any money from the persons concerned: this gentleman was for ever borrowing money, or rather, begging for charity in this disguise when, having pulled a few faces and given people some entertainment at his expense, he felt he had in a certain sense a right to borrow from them. But, my goodness! What sort of borrowing was this? And with such an air did he go about it! I would never

have thought that there could be room, in such a small space as the wrinkled, angular face of this little man, for so many heterogeneous grimaces, for so many strange and diverse emotions, so many of the most terrible expressions. What was there not to be found there: shame, pretended insolence, annoyance (with a sudden colouring of his features), anger, fear of failure, a plea for forgiveness for having dared to make a nuisance of himself, a consciousness of his own worth, and an even fuller consciousness of his own insignificance – all this passed like lightning across his face. For all of six years he had struggled along in God's world like this, and to date had not succeeded in cutting a tolerable figure at the important moment of borrowing. It was, of course, simply impossible that he should ever grow callous and mean through and through. His heart was too lively, too passionate for that! I will go even further, and say that he was, in my opinion, one of the most noble individuals the world has ever seen, with, however, one small weakness: that of committing base deeds at the slightest prompting, committing them good-naturally and disinterestedly, solely in order to oblige a fellow human being. In short, he was a living example of what is known as 'a spineless creature'. The most ridiculous thing of all was that he was dressed more or less just like everyone else, no better and no worse, cleanly, even with a certain degree of refinement and with a feeble impulse in the direction of respectability and a sense of personal dignity. This outward equality and inward lack of it, his nervous fear for himself and his continual self-depreciation – all this formed a most striking contrast and was worthy of laughter and compassion. If he had felt certain at heart (something that happened to him constantly, in spite of experience) that all his listeners were the kindest people in the world, who would laugh only at a ridiculous deed, and not at his doomed personality, then he would gladly have taken off his jacket and put it back on inside out, and then walked about the streets dressed like that for the diversion of others and his own pleasure, just as long as he was able to make his patrons laugh and provide them all with enjoyment. But as for equality, it for ever lay beyond his grasp, not to be attained by any means. He had another trait: the strange fellow was proud and even, by fits and starts, as long as there was no danger in it, magnanimous. One needed to see and hear for oneself the way he was sometimes able, not sparing himself and consequently at a risk to himself, and even with a certain degree of heroism, to haul certain of his 'patrons' over the coals when they had infuriated him beyond all endurance. But that was only at moments... In short, he was a martyr in the full sense of the term, but a martyr who was utterly useless and therefore utterly comic.

An argument had arisen among the guests. I suddenly saw my strange fellow leap up from his chair and start shouting as loud as he was able, demanding that he be given the sole and exclusive attention of those present.

'Listen,' the host whispered to me. 'He sometimes tells the most curious stories... Do you find him interesting?'

I nodded, and squeezed my way into the crowd. The spectacle of a rather well-dressed gentleman jumping up on a chair and

shouting at the top of his voice had indeed aroused general attention. Many people who did not know the strange fellow exchanged looks of bewilderment, while others laughed like drains.

‘I know Fedosei Nikolaich! I know Fedosei Nikolaich better than anyone does!’ the strange fellow cried from his elevation. ‘Let me tell you about him, gentlemen. I can tell you some good stories about Fedosei Nikolaich! There’s one I know that’s an absolute wonder!...’

‘All right, Osip Mikhailich, tell us it, then.’

‘Yes, go on, tell us it!’

‘Listen, then...’

‘Listen, listen!’

‘I shall begin; but, gentlemen, this is a peculiar story...’

‘Excellent, excellent!’

‘It is a comical story.’

‘Wonderful, magnificent, marvellous! Get on with it!’

‘It’s an episode from the private life of your most humble...’

‘Well, why did you have to go out of your way to tell us it was a comical story, then?’

‘And it’s even somewhat tragic!’

‘Eh?’

‘In short, the story which you are now about to enjoy hearing me tell, gentlemen – the story in consequence of which I have landed in such *interesting* company...’

‘No puns!’

‘The story...’

‘Yes, the story – come on, get the preambles over with – a story that’s worth the telling,’ a fair-haired young man with a moustache said in a hoarse voice, lowering his hand into the pocket of his frock-coat and, as though by accident, producing his wallet instead of his handkerchief.

‘The story, my dear sirs, which prompts me to wonder what

many of you would have done when it was all over, had you been in my shoes. And, finally, the story as a consequence of which I did not get married.'

'Married?... A wife?... Polzunkov had plans to marry!'

'I must say I'd like to see Madame Polzunkov!'

'I'd be curious to learn the first name of the ci-devant Madame Polzunkov!' squeaked one young fellow, elbowing his way through to the speaker.

'Well, gentlemen: chapter one. It happened just six years ago, in spring, on the thirty-first of March – take note of the date, gentlemen – on the eve of...'

'The first of April!' cried a young fellow with curls.

'You are remarkably perceptive, sir. It was evening. Dusk was thickening over the provincial market town of N., and the moon was about to come floating out... well, and everything else was just as it ought to be. So, my good sirs, when dusk had practically fallen I, too, floated out of my miserable lodgings on the quiet, having taken my leave of my reclusive grandmother, now deceased. You must forgive me, gentlemen, for using such a modish expression, which I last heard at Nikolai Nikolaich's. But my grandmother really was a *recluse*: she was blind, deaf, dumb and gaga – the lot!... I must confess I was in a bit of a state, for I was preparing myself for a great deed; my heart was beating like that of a kitten grabbed by the scruff of the neck in someone's bony hand.'

'Er, *Monsieur* Polzunkov.'

'What is it?'

'Please tell the story more simply; don't try so hard!'

'Very well, sir,' replied a slightly embarrassed Osip Mikhailich. 'I entered the house of Fedosei Nikolaich (he owns it). Fedosei Nikolaich is, as you are aware, no mere fellow-employee, but a real head of department. I was announced and at once led into the study. I see it now: the room was quite dark, or almost quite, but there were no candles. As I looked, Fedosei Nikolaich walked in. There we were, he and I, in the darkness together...'

'What took place between you?' an officer enquired.

‘What do you think?’ said Polzunkov, instantly turning in the direction of the curly-headed youth, his face moving convulsively. ‘Well, gentlemen, at that point a strange thing happened. Or rather, it wasn’t really strange, but just what’s known as a common occurrence. Quite simply, I took a bundle of papers from my pocket, and so did he, only his were government ones...’

‘Banknotes?’

‘Yes, banknotes, and we made a swap.’

‘I dare say there was a whiff of bribery about it,’ said a soberly dressed and close-cropped young gentleman.

‘Bribery!’ said Polzunkov. ‘Oh, for heaven’s sake:

Let me be a liberal,

Like many I have seen!

If, when it comes to your turn to serve in the provinces, you don’t warm your hands... at your nation’s hearth... Why, a certain literary gentleman has said: “Even the smoke of the fatherland is sweet and pleasant to us!”* Our motherland is our mother, our mother, gentlemen, we are her fledglings and from her we derive our sustenance!’

There was general mirth.

‘But you must believe me, gentlemen, when I tell you that never have I been in the habit of taking bribes,’ Polzunkov went on, surveying the entire company with mistrust. A burst of Homeric, unstopable laughter swallowed his words.

‘It’s really true, gentlemen...’

At this point, however, he stopped, and continued to survey everyone with a strange expression on his face. Perhaps – who knows – perhaps at that moment it had occurred to him that he was somewhat more honest than many in that whole honest company... Whatever the case, the serious expression on his face did not disappear until the universal merriment had completely run its course.

‘Well then,’ Polzunkov began, when they had all fallen silent. ‘Although I have never accepted bribes, on this occasion I sinned: I

put in my pocket a bribe... from a bribe-taker... That's to say, there were in my hands certain papers which, if I had decided to send them to certain persons, would have done Fedosei Nikolaich no good.'

'You mean he bought them from you?'

'That's correct.'

'Did he give you a lot for them?'

'He gave me as much as many a man would sell his conscience for in our time, the whole paraphernalia with all its brass knobs on, sir... as long as he got something for it. But I felt as though I had burnt my hand when I put the money in my pocket. I really don't know what comes over me at such times, gentlemen – but there I go, I'm more dead than alive, my lips move, my legs tremble; well, I was so ashamed I nearly turned into a jelly, I was ready to beg Fedosei Nikolaich's forgiveness...'

'Well, and did he forgive you?'

'Oh, I didn't actually beg him, sir... All I mean is that that was what I felt like at the time; that I have a passionate heart, in other words. I saw he was looking straight at me. "Have you no fear of God, Osip Mikhailich?" he said. Well, what was I to do? I just spread my hands in a proper sort of way, and put my head on one side. "Why do you think I have no fear of God, Fedosei Nikolaich?" I said. But I only said it because it sounded the proper thing to say... Actually, I was wishing the floor would open and swallow me up. "Having been a friend of my family for so long, having been, I should even say, like a son to me – and who knows what Heaven intended for us, Osip Mikhailich? – to suddenly go and write a report denouncing me to the authorities, and on such an occasion, too!... What am I to think of the human race after this, Osip Mikhailich?" Oh, he read me a proper sermon, gentlemen! "Yes," he said, "just you tell me what I'm to think of the human race after this, Osip Mikhailich." "What indeed?" I thought to myself! There was a clawing in my throat, and my wretched voice was trembling – well, I could feel my bad habit coming on, and so I grabbed my hat... "Where are you off to, Osip Mikhailich? Surely you can bear me no ill-will on the eve of such a day; in what way have I sinned against you?" "Fedosei Nikolaich," I said, "Fedosei Nikolaich!" Yes,

I melted, gentlemen, I melted like a wet sugar-stick. No wonder! The very envelope that contained the banknotes and that sat in my pocket seemed to be shouting “You ingrate, you brigand, you accursed thief!” It felt as heavy as though it weighed five poods... (Ah, if only it really had contained five poods!...) “I see,” said Fedosei Nikolaich, “I see that you have repented of your ways... You know, tomorrow is –” “The Feast of St Mary of Egypt, * sir.” “Well, don’t cry,” said Fedosei Nikolaich. “That’s enough, now: you’ve sinned and repented! Come! Perhaps I shall succeed in returning you to the true path,” he said... “Perhaps my modest penates [I remember he used that very word, penates] will restore some warmth to your harden – I will not say hardened – your erring heart...” He took me by the arm, gentlemen, and led me to his household. A chill ran down my spine; I shivered! I thought of how my eyes would look when I introduced myself... But I should tell you, gentlemen, that at this point a... how shall I put it?... ticklish situation arose.’

‘Mrs Polzunkov?’

‘Marya Fedoseyevna, sir. Only she was not destined to be the “Mrs” you called her, she was not accorded that honour. That Fedosei Nikolaich was right, you see, when he said I had been almost like a son to him in his household. That was how it had been half a year previously, when a certain retired *junker*, Mikhailo Maksimych Dvigailov by name, was still alive. Subsequently he passed away by God’s decree, but he had put all his arrangements for a will away in his bottom drawer; and it turned out that he couldn’t be found in any sort of drawer at all afterwards...’

‘Ugh!’

‘Oh, it’s all right, say no more, gentlemen, forgive me, it was a slip of the tongue – it was a bad pun, but that’s not the half of it – it was a far worse kettle of fish when I was left, as it were, with nothing but a zero in view, because that retired *junker*, though he would not allow me into his house (he lived in a grand style, as he’d always known how to rake the lucre in), had also, perhaps not mistakenly, treated me like his own son.’

‘Aha!’

‘Yes, sir, that’s how it was! Well, they began to make long noses

at me in Fedosei Nikolaich's house. I observed and took note, I endured and stood firm, and then suddenly, to my misfortune (though perhaps it was to my good fortune!), a remount officer galloped into our wretched little town like a bolt from the blue. True, his business was a lively, airy, cavalry-style one—but he settled himself down as heavily at Fedosei Nikolaich's house as if he were a dug-in mortar! I came to the point by a devious, roundabout route, as it's my vile habit to do, saying, "Why are you insulting me, Fedosei Nikolaich? In a certain sense I'm your son... When are you going to start treating me like a father?" My dear sir, did he start to answer me back! Well, I mean, once he gets going he spouts an entire epic poem in twelve cantos, with rhyme, just listening to him is enough to make you lick your lips and spread out your hands with enjoyment, but there's not a copeck's worth of sense in it, or what sense there is there's no making out; you can't take in a word of it and you stand there like a fool while the cloud thickens up and he whirls around like a bit of quicksilver and escapes scot-free; yes, it's a talent, simply a talent, the kind of gift that frightens other people even though it has nothing to do with them. I went rushing about in all directions: I couldn't think what to do! I brought romances, confectionery, I thought up fancy phrases, I sighed and groaned, said that my heart was aching with *amour*, and then resorted to tears and secret explanations! Man's a foolish creature, after all! I mean, he hadn't gone to check with the parish clerk to see if I really was only thirty years old, had he?... so I tried a bit of cunning! But no, it didn't work, all I got was jeers and laughter all round – well, I was seized with anger, completely choked with it – I slipped away, resolved never to set foot inside his house again, thought and thought – and by jingo, I decided to report him to the authorities! Well, I admit it was a mean thing to do, to give away a friend, but I had a lot of evidence, wonderful evidence, capital stuff! I got fifteen hundred rubles in silver for it when I swapped it, together with my denunciatory report, for government banknotes.'

'Aha, so that was the bribe!'

'Yes, sir, that was the bribe, and it was a bribe-taker who paid me it! (And I mean to say, it wasn't a crime – far from it!) Well, now I shall begin the sequel to my tale: he had dragged me, if you will remember, into the tea-parlour, more dead than alive; they greeted me: they all seemed offended, that's to say, not so much

offended as... thoroughly vexed and irritated, to such a degree that they were simply... well, desperate, completely desperate, yet all the while their faces shone with a look of such irreproachable dignity, their eyes had such a sedate, sober expression, in which there was something fatherly, familial... the prodigal son had returned to them – that was what it all amounted to! They offered me a place at their tea table, but they might as well not have bothered: I felt as though I had a samovar boiling and bubbling inside me, while my feet were like ice – I felt small, I was terrified! He was only a court councillor (he's a collegiate assessor now), yet his wife, Marya Fom-inishna, began to address me by the familiar 'thou' form right from the word go: "How thin you've grown, uncle," she said. "Yes, I've been indisposed, Marya Fominishna," I replied... My wretched little voice was trembling! And then, for no apparent reason at all – she must have been waiting to get her own back, the venomous creature – she said: "Your conscience has evidently been troubling you, Osip Mikhailich, dear man! Our family hospitality has cried aloud in your face! I have shed tears of blood because of you!" I swear to you she actually had the nerve to use those very words! Oh, but that was nothing to her – she was a real battleaxe. She just sat there pouring tea. "If you were at the market, my dear, I bet you'd shout down all the peasant women there," I thought. That's the sort of woman she was, our court councillor's wife! And then, to my misfortune, Marya Fedoseyevna, her daughter, came in with all her innocent ways, a little pale, her eyes reddened as though from tears – and like a fool I went to perdition, right there and then. It later transpired, however, that she had been shedding her tears over the remount officer: he had beetled off home, and had well and truly shown a clean pair of heels, because, you see (it's necessary to mention it now), it had come to the point when he had to part company, his time had run out; not that he'd had an officially appointed forage term, no, it was simply that... when the fond parents later discovered what had been going on and became acquainted with all the couple's cherished secrets, there wasn't much they could do about it – they hushed the disaster up: an addition to their family!... Well, it was no good, no sooner had I glanced at her, than I went to perdition, quite simply went to perdition; I took a sideways look at my hat, thought of snatching it up and beetling off at the double; it was not to be – they'd made off with my hat... I

even thought of going without my hat – but they'd latched the door, and there ensued friendly little bursts of laughter, winking and flirting; I grew flustered and talked some rot or other, held forth on the subject of *amour*, she, my little dove, sat down at the clavichord and, in offended tones, sang the song about the hussar who leaned on his sabre* – that was the end of me!“Well,” said Fedosei Nikolaich, “it’s all forgotten, come come... into my arms!” Instantly, without further ado, I pressed my face against his waistcoat, just as I was. “My benefactor, you are like a father to me,” I said. And what burning tears I shed! Lord God, what a hubbub there arose then! He wept, his good woman wept, Mashenka wept... There was a little blonde girl there, and she wept, too... Not only that – the little infants came crawling out from every corner (the Lord had blessed his house!), and they bawled, too... there were that many tears, all this joy and tender emotion was because they had got their prodigal son back, it was as if a soldier were returning to his motherland! At that point refreshments were served, and a game of forfeits began: “Oh, it hurts!” “What does?” “My heart.” For whom? She blushed, the little dove! The old man and I had some punch... Well, they completely wore me out with all their treats and enjoyments... I went home to grandmother. My head was in a spin; all the way there I kept laughing to myself, and when I got there I spent two good hours pacing up and down the little room. I woke the old woman up and told her all about my good fortune. “And did he give you any money, the brigand?” “Yes, he did, grandmother, he did, he did, my dear relative – fortune has smiled on us and showered us with plenty!” “Well, all you need to do now is marry her, then; go on, while you’re at it, marry her,” the old woman said to me. “At last my prayers have been answered.” I woke up Sofron. “Sofron,” I said, “take my boots off for me.” Sofron pulled my boots off. “Well, Sofrosha! Now congratulate me, embrace me! I’m getting married, old chap, it’s as simple as that, I’m getting married! You can drink yourself senseless tomorrow, you can blow your head off, I tell you: your master’s getting married!” Oh, it was laughter and games all round!... I was almost on the point of falling asleep when something made me get up again. I sat and thought; suddenly a realization flashed through my head: tomorrow was the first of April, a day for fun and skylarking, so how about it? And I conceived a plan! Why, sirs, I got up from my bed, lit a candle, sat down at the writing desk attired just as I was, in other words I let

myself go completely, and got carried away – you know what it’s like, gentlemen, when a man gets carried away! My dear fellows, I waded into the mire until it covered my head! That’s to say, it goes something like this: they take something away from you, and you give them something else, as well: it’s as if you were to say: “Here you are, take that, too!” They smite you on the right cheek, and you turn the other to them for good measure. Then they begin to entice you like a dog with a doughnut, and you paw them with your stupid paws and slobber over them with all your heart and soul! I mean, I’m doing it now, gentlemen! You’re laughing and whispering to one another, do you think I don’t see? Later on, when I’ve told you all my cherished secrets, you’ll begin to hold me up to ridicule, you’ll tell me to clear off, yet I’ll go on talking and talking and talking! Well, who was it asked me to talk? The very same people who’ll tell me to clear off! The very same people who are leaning over my shoulder, whispering, “Go on, talk, talk, tell us all about it!” And so I talk, I tell you all about it, I worm myself into your confidence as though you were all my own dear brothers, my bosom friends... A-ach!...

The roar of laughter which had gradually begun to build up on all sides ended by completely drowning the voice of the narrator, who had worked himself up into a state of genuine ecstasy; he stopped talking, let his eyes pass over the company for a few moments, and then suddenly, as though he had been carried away by some whirlwind, waved a hand in the air and burst out laughing as though he really found his situation a comical one, and once again launched into his narrative:

“That night I hardly slept a wink, gentlemen; I spent the whole of it putting a document together; you see, I’d thought up a practical joke! Ach, gentlemen, I’m ashamed even to remember it! It wouldn’t have been so bad if it had just been some idea I’d conceived during the night: well, if I’d been drunk, gone astray, concocted a lot of nonsense, written some rot – but no! I woke up at the crack of dawn next morning, having only slept an hour or two, and carried on with the same plan! I washed and dressed, I curled and pomaded my hair, I put on my new dress jacket and went straight to Fedosei Nikolaich’s house for the holiday festivities with the document tucked inside my hat. He welcomed me with open arms, and again summoned me to his parental waistcoat. I assumed

a dignified air, for last night's thoughts were still bubbling in my brain! I took a step backwards. "No, Fedosei Nikolaich," I said, "but please be so good as to read this document" – and I gave it to him as a petition; and do you know what was in the petition? It said, "For such-and-such and such-and-such reasons Osip Mikhailich requests to be discharged," and underneath this I'd scribbled the entire description of my rank! That was what I'd thought up, you see, Lord help me! I couldn't think of anything cleverer than that! It being the first of April, I had decided to pretend, for the sake of a joke, that I still had not got over my sense of injury, that I had had second thoughts during the night, had second thoughts and grown thoroughly morose, and was feeling more insulted than ever, saying, "Here's something for your ears, my dear benefactors – I don't want any more to do with either you or your daughter; I pocketed some money yesterday, so I'm provided for, and here's a petition requesting my discharge. I don't want to work under a boss like Fedosei Nikolaich! I want to be transferred to another section, and then you'd better watch out, because there I'll inform on you to the authorities. That was the kind of scoundrel I presented myself as – I'd decided to give them a fright! And a pretty good way of frightening them I'd found! Eh? Don't you think, gentlemen? In other words, my heart had begun to warm to them since the previous day, so in return I thought I might have a little joke at the family's expense, and tease the dear parental heart of Fedosei Nikolaich..."

'No sooner had he taken my document and unfolded it than I saw his entire physiognomy undergo a rapid change. "What on earth, Osip Mikhailich?" he said. And I, like an idiot, said: "April fool! Happy holiday to you, Fedosei Nikolaich!" Just like a little boy who has been hiding behind his grandmother's armchair and then suddenly shouts "Oof!" into her ear at the top of his voice in order to give her a fright. Yes... I feel ashamed even just telling you about it, gentlemen! And, in fact, no! I shan't tell you!'

'Oh, go on, what happened next?'

'Yes, continue the story! Go on,' voices said on all sides.

"There was a flurry of rumours and gossip, of oh's and ah's, dear sirs! They said I was a prankster, a joker, said I'd given them a fright – such extremely sweet things that I even felt embarrassed,

stood there in terror wondering how a holy place such as this could ever possibly have come to accommodate a sinner like myself. “Oh, my dear man,” squeaked the councillor’s wife, “you gave me such a fright that my legs are still a-tremble, they can hardly hold me up! I ran across to Masha like a woman half crazy. “Mashenka,’ I said, ‘what’s to become of us? Look at the sort of man your intended has turned out to be! It’s my fault too, he’s like one of the family, you must forgive an old woman, I made a fool of myself.’ Well, I thought, when he left our house yesterday and arrived home late, perhaps he began to think, perhaps he fancied that we’d made such a fuss of him on purpose, that we were trying to entice him into our web – and I nearly passed away at the thought! That’s enough, Mashenka, that’s enough of your winking at me; Osip Mikhailich is no stranger to us and I am your mother, after all – I shan’t make any objections! I haven’t been living in the world for only twenty years, thank the Lord, but a good forty-five...”

‘Well, gentlemen, I almost tumbled in a heap at her feet right there and then! Again a few tears were shed, again there was kissing and embracing. More jokes got under way! Fedosei Nikolaich had in his wisdom also decided to concoct a bit of April foolery! He told us that the Firebird had come flying down carrying a letter in its diamond beak! He also tried to deceive us – what laughter there was! What tender emotion! Pah! It’s humiliating even to tell you about it!

‘Well, my good sirs, that’s more or less the long and the short of it. We spent one day, two days, three days, a week together, and in no time at all I was the perfect fiancé! Why, the rings were ordered, the day was appointed, only they didn’t want to declare the banns in advance, as they were waiting for the government inspector to arrive. So was I, but I’d run out of patience – my happiness depended on that government inspector! Let’s get it over with quickly, I thought. And in the midst of all the bustle and celebrations Fedosei Nikolaich unloaded all the work on to me: I was to draw up the accounts, write the reports, check the ledgers, balance the totals. I went to take a look: everything was in the most terrible state of chaos and desolation, there were snags and tangles everywhere. Well, I thought, I suppose I don’t mind putting myself out for my father-in-law. He’d been taken ill with some complaint or other, and from day to day you could see he was getting worse. Why, I myself

was as thin as a matchstick, I couldn't sleep at nights, I was afraid I'd have a breakdown. But I managed to complete the work magnificently! I helped him out on time! Suddenly a messenger arrived – they'd sent him to me. "Hurry," he said, "Fedosei Nikolaich is in a bad way!" I went running off at breakneckspeed – whaton earth? I looked, and there was my Fedosei Nikolaich bandaged with a vinegar compress round his head, screwing his face up, moaning and groaning. "Oh! Oh! My dear, good boy," he said, "if I die, who will look after you, my fledglings?" His wife came in, dragging all their children with her. Mashenka was in tears – well, even I began to snivel a bit!"No," he said, "God will be merciful, he won't make you answer for all my transgressions!" Then he told them all to go out of the room and close the door after them, and we were left alone, he and I, face to face with each other. "I have a request to make of you," he said. "What's that?" I asked. "Well, dear boy, I'm getting no rest even on my deathbed, I'm completely skint!" "How did that happen?" At that point I blushed scarlet, and lost my tongue. "Well, it's like this, dear chap: I had to pay some of my own money to the Treasury; it's not that I grudge anything for the common weal. I wouldn't even grudge my life for it! Don't go thinking anything like that! It makes me sad to think that slanderers should have blackened my name to your ears... You were mistaken, and my hair has turned white from grief since that time. The government inspector is practically on top of us and Matveyev is seven thousand rubles short, and I'm responsible... who else? They'll make me answer for it, dear boy: where was I looking? And how can I get it from Matveyev? He's had enough already; why should I do the poor wretched fellow in?" "Sainted fathers," I thought, "there's a righteous man for you! What a soul!" "The thing is," he said, "that I don't want to touch the money that's been set aside for my daughter's dowry – that's a sacred sum! It's true that I have money of my own, but I've lent it all to various people, and how could I get it back all at once?" I flung myself on my knees before him, without further ado. "My benefactor!" I shouted, "I have insulted you, I have greatly offended you, it was slanderers who wrote those reports about you, don't crush me utterly, take your money back!" He looked at me, and the tears flowed from his eyes. "I expected no less of you, my son. Arise," he said. "I forgave you then for the sake of my daughter's tears – now my heart, too, forgives you. You have healed my wounds. I bless you for ever

more!” Well, when he blessed me, gentlemen, I scarpered off home at the double and got the money. “Here, father, it’s all here, apart from fifty rubles which I’ve spent!” “Well, never mind, every little counts now; there’s not much time – write up a backdated report, saying you’ve run out of funds and are asking for fifty rubles’ salary in advance. Then I’ll be able to show officially that you were paid that money on account...” Well, gentlemen, what do you suppose I did? Yes, I actually wrote up that report!...

‘Oh, really... Well, what happened then? How did it all end?’

‘No sooner had I written the report, my dear sirs, than it all ended in the following manner: bright and early the next morning there arrived an envelope with a government seal. I looked – what had I received? A discharge notice! I was told to hand in my work, square my accounts and be off wherever the wind blows!’

‘How could that be?’

‘That’s just what I shouted at the top of my voice, gentlemen: “How can this be?” Why, my ears had fairly started to ring. At first I thought it was fairly straightforward – but no: the government inspector had arrived in town. My heart missed a beat!”No, there’s more to it than meets the eye,” I thought. I hurried off to see Fedosei Nikolaich, just as I was. “What’s this?” I said. “What’s what?” he replied. “This discharge notice!” “What discharge notice?” “This one!” “Well, so what if it is a discharge notice?” “But I didn’t ask to be discharged!” “What? You put in an application. You put it in on the first of April.” (I hadn’t taken my document back!) “Fedosei Nikolaich, do my ears hear correctly, do my eyes deceive me? Is this really you?” “Of course it’s me – who else?” “Good God!” “I’m sorry, sir, I can’t say how sorry I am that you’ve decided to retire from your post so early. A young man needs to work, and you’ve been behaving in rather a light-headed sort of way recently. But as for your testimonial, put your mind at rest: I’ll do the necessary. You’ve always given a very good account of yourself!” “But it was just a joke, Fedosei Nikolaich, I never intended... I only gave you the document for your parental... you know...” “No, I don’t know. What do you mean, it was just a joke, sir? Does one make jokes with that kind of document? If you go on playing jokes like that you’ll end up being sent to Siberia one of these days. But now I must say goodbye, I’ve no time to talk to you;

we have the inspector general here, and the demands of duty must come first; it's all very well for you to sit around kicking your heels, but we have work to do. But I will see that you get a proper testimonial. Oh, there's one other thing: I've just bought Matveyev's house from him. We shall be moving in in a couple of days' time, and I hope I shall *not* have the pleasure of seeing you at our housewarming. A safe journey to you!" I scurried off home as fast as my legs would carry me. "We're lost, grandmother!" I cried. She began to wail, poor old soul; and then, as we watched, one of Fedosei Nikolaich's boy-servants came running up with a note and a starling in a cage; out of the kindness of my heart I gave her the starling; the note said "April ist" – that was all. There, gentlemen; what do you think of that?

'Well, and what happened then? Go on, tell us!'

'Oh, not much. I once ran into Fedosei Nikolaich, and was about to tell him to his face that he was a villain...'

'Yes?'

'But somehow I couldn't get the words out, gentlemen!'

NOTES



POOR FOLK

p. 3 The epigraph is taken from a short story by V. F. Odoyevsky, *The Living Corpse* (1839).

p. 6 *Brambew*. 'Baron Brambeus' was the literary pseudonym of O. I. Senkovsky (1800-58), editor of the journal *Library for Reading*, whose articles and stories made him (as Gogol observes in *The Government Inspector*) one of the idols of the minor civil-servant classes, and of the less well-educated Russian reading public in general.

p. 6 *thirty-five paper rubles: assignatsii*, paper money introduced into Russia in 1769, but replaced in 1843 by credit notes. In the 1830s one paper ruble was equivalent to twenty-seven silver copecks.

p. 7 *Devushkin*: the name is derived from the Russian word *devushka*, 'a girl'.

p. 9 *Dobroselova*: the name means 'good village'.

p. 15 *an assessor in Tula*: possibly a quotation from Pushkin's *Fragments from Onegin's journey*:

Why, like an assessor in Tula,

Am I not lying in a palsy?

p. 15 *Teresa and Faldoni*: the names of the unhappy lovers in the sentimental novel of the same name by the Frenchwriter N. G. Léonard (1744-93). The novel was translated into Russian in 1804, and became a popular success.

p. 16 *Such temperate weather*: a reference to *The Divine Liturgy of Our Fathers Among the Saints John Chrysostom and Basil the Great*: 'For temperate weather, abundance of fruits of the earth, and for peaceful seasons, let us pray to the Lord' (*The Orthodox Liturgy*, SPCK, 1982).

p. 19 *it hardly gets dark at nights now*: in Leningrad (St Petersburg) the end of

May is the season of 'White nights'.

p. 21 *the St Petersburg Side*: the St Petersburg side of the River Neva, facing the 'Vyborg Side'.

p. 22 *Lomond's grammar: A Complete Trench Grammar, Comprising the Rules of Pronunciation, Composition and Spelling of Words, Composed by Lomond, and Corrected and Supplemented by Letelier*, Moscow, 1831.

p. 23 *Zapolsky's: A New Textbook of the French Language, Comprising an Alphabet, Etymology, Syntax and Examples*, published by V. Zapolsky, Moscow, 1817.

p. 37 *the complete collection of Pushkin's works in the most recent edition*: the first posthumous edition of Pushkin's *Works*, which were published in St Petersburg during the years 1838-41 in eleven volumes.

p. 54 *the Kamenny Poyas*: a region of Siberia.

p. 56 *a Romany wine: Romaneya*, a sweet wine.

p. 56 *Paul de Kock*: French novelist (1793-1871) who wrote bawdy, sentimental novels about Paris life, which were very popular abroad, particularly in England and Russia.

p. 57 *Tales of Belkin*: this is probably the first edition (1831) of Pushkin's collection of short stories.

p. 62 *The Picture of Man: The Picture of Man, an Edifying Treatise on Aspects of Self-knowledge for All the Educated Classes, Drawn by A. Galich*, St Petersburg, 1834. The psychologist and philosopher A. I. Galich (1783-1848) was one of Pushkin's teachers at the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum. It is probable that Dostoyevsky heard extracts from the *Picture* read aloud at the family readings which took place in his childhood home.

p. 62 *The Little Bell-ringer: Le Petit Sonneur*, a novel by the French sentimental-romantic writer F. G. Decray-Dumesnil (1761-1819).

p. 62 *The Cranes of Ibis*: Schiller's well-known poem, in the Russian translation by V. A. Zhukovsky (1813).

p. 62 *The Stationmaster*: one of Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin*. Samson Vyrin is the principal character in the story.

p. 63 *the vogue now was for books with illustrations and various kinds of description*: in literary Russia, the 1840s were the period of the 'physiological sketch'. These sketches or 'descriptions' were usually accompanied by engraved illustrations depicting 'types' – the representatives of the various estates and professions.

p. 64 *I am sending you a book...* *The Overcoat*: the third volume of Gogol's *Works*, which appeared at the beginning of 1843, and in which *The Overcoat* received its first publication.

p. 73 *I met Yemelya*: Yemelya appears again in Dostoyevsky's *The Honest Thief*, where his character receives further development as Yemelyan Ilyich.

p. 80 *some kind of fourteenth-class civil servant*: the fourteenth class was the

lowest category in the table of civil service ranks inaugurated by Peter the Great.

p. 90 *Lovelace*: a seducer. From the name of the hero of Richardson's novel *Clarissa*.

p. 95 *izbas*: huts, small wooden dwellings.

p. 112 *I read the Bee*: the conservative newspaper *The Northern Bee*, published in St Petersburg from 1825 until 1864 by F. V. Bulgakov and N. I. Grech. Gogol mentions the *Bee* as the preferred reading of minor government clerks in his *The Diary of a Madman*.

p. 122 *canezou*: sleeveless blouse.

THE LANDLADY

p. 136 *like a flâneur*: the word *flâneur*, which Dostoyevsky also uses in his *feuilleton* 'A St Petersburg Chronicle', dated 1 June 1847, was new at this time in Russian literature. It came to Russia via the novels of Balzac and the French 'physiological sketch'.

p. 140 *a German nicknamed Spiess*: Dostoevsky is evidently imitating Gogol here – in Gogol's *The Nevsky Prospekt* there are German craftsmen named Schiller and Hoffmann. Ch. H. Spiess (1755-99) was a German writer, whose novels on chivalric and fantastic subjects were popular in Russia. The name also suggests *Spiessbürger* (petty bourgeois).

p. 154 *whole cemeteries giving up to him their dead*: possibly an allusion to Pushkin's tragedy *The Covetous Knight*, scene 2:

the awesome witch
That makes the moon grow dim, the grave, confounded,
Yield up its dead?...

(tr. Antony Wood)

In their choice of this image, both Pushkin and Dostoyevsky appear to have been influenced by Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (cf. Act III, scene 4).

p. 155 *Stenka Razin*: Stepan Timofeyevich (1630-71), leader of the uprising in the Peasant's War (1670-71) (see Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*).

p. 160 *I'm back at the local station*: Yaroslav Ilyich is a police clerk (he also appears in *Mr Prokharchin*).

p. 162 *Koshmarov's Tenements*: the (fictional) name 'Koshmarov' is derived from the French: *cauchemar* ('nightmare').

p. 165 *Pushkin himself mentions something similar in his writings*: Yaroslav Ilyich is possibly referring here to certain features of Pushkin's biography, such as his visits to a fortune-teller and his wearing of a talismanic ring.

p. 201 *like a plaster kitten*: cf. Gogol, *The Overcoat*: 'His collar was low and narrow, so that his neck, in spite of its not being long, seemed inordinately long as it emerged from the collar, like the neck of one of those plaster kittens with wagging heads which our foreign tradesmen carry about on head-trays in their dozens.'

p. 211 *He had, what was more, grown sidewhiskers*: a hint that Yaroslav Ilyich has probably been sacked from the government service for taking bribes – civil servants were forbidden to wear sidewhiskers.

MR PROKHARCHIN

p. 215 *Prokharchin*: the name derives from the Russian word *kharchi*, meaning 'grub', or 'Vittles'. The hero of the story has *prokbarchilsya* – gone without food to the point where he suffers the fate Dostoyevsky describes.

p. 218 *This had happened back in Peski*: Peski was an outlying district of St Petersburg which adjoined the Smolny monastery.

p. 218 *the raznochinet Kantarev*: a *raznochinet* was an intellectual or educated person who did not belong to the gentry.

p. 219 *shchi*: cabbage soup.

p. 223 *some kind of examination in all subjects*: according to an imperial decree of 1809, drafted by M. I. Speransky, government clerks (*chinovniki*) were to be compelled to take examinations in order to obtain civil rank. The decree was not implemented, however, and existed only on paper.

p. 226 *Tolkuchy Market*: this was situated on Sadovaya Street, inside Apraksin Dvor.

p. 226 *Krivoy Lane*: in the 1840s Krivoy Lane was situated between the Fontanka and Zagorodny Prospekt.

p. 227 *'noses' and 'three leaves'*: card games.

p. 237 *you'd eat it yourself with bread and never notice*: a reference to Gogol's tale *The Nose* (1836).

p. 240 *they'll give you the buckle*: the buckle was a symbol of military service.

p. 244 *pyatak*: five-copeck piece.

p. 247 *a'thrifty' swallow*: a reference to Derzhavin's poem 'The Swallow' (1792).

POLZUNKOV

p. 249 *Polzunkov*: the name, derived from the verb *polzat'*, evokes creeping and crawling.

p. 255 *Even the smoke of the fatherland is sweet and pleasant to us!*: these words of Chatsky's in A. S. Griboyedov's play *Woe from Wit* are in their turn a quotation from G. R. Derzhavin's poem 'The Harp' (1798).

p. 257 *The Feast of St Mary of Egypt*: this falls on 1 April (Gregorian calendar); 13 April (new style).

p. 260 *the hussar who leaned on his sabre*: an allusion to M. Yu. Vielgor-sky's romance to the words of K. N. Batyushkov's elegy 'Parting' (1812–13). The romance was popular during the 1850s and 1860s – Katerina Ivanovna mentions it in *Crime and Punishment*.

* Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky, His Life and Work*, Princeton, 1967, p. [22](#).

*In the final version of *Poor Folk*, Dostoyevsky used the form 'His Excellency', though he did preserve the plural in the verbs, an effect impossible to translate into English.